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MISS CAREW.

VOL. II.

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MISS CAREW.

BY

AMELIA B. EDWARDS,

AUTHOR OF

"BARBARA'S HISTORY,"

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
SUCCESSORS TO HENRY COLBURN,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.
1865.

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CHAPTER I.

THE PATAGONIAN BROTHERS.

WE are not related. His name is John Griffiths, and I am William Waldur; and we called ourselves the Patagonian Brothers, because it looked well in the bills and pleased the public. We met by chance, about six years since, on the race-course at Doncaster, and so took a sort of mutual liking, and went partners in a tour through the midland counties. We had never seen or heard of each other up to that time; and though we became good friends, were never greatly intimate. I knew nothing of his past life, nor he of mine; and I never asked him a question on the subject. I am particular to

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a half in all, and played at every town between York and London. During that time we had found leisure to improve. We knew each other's weight and strength now to a hair, and grew bolder with experience; so that there was scarcely a new feat brought out anywhere which we did not learn, even to the "perche" business, and the trick of walking, head downwards, on a marble ceiling. The fact is, that we were admirably matched, which, in our profession, is the most important point of all. Our height was the same, to the sixteenth of an inch, and we were not unlike in figure. If Griffiths possessed a little more muscular strength, I was the more active, and even that difference was in our favour. I believe that, in other respects, we suited each other equally well, and I know that, for the three years and a half which we had spent together (counting from our first meeting at Doncaster down to the time when we dissolved partnership with

the circus folks) we had never had an angry word. Griffiths was a steady, saving, silent fellow enough, with little grey eyes and heavy black brows. I remember thinking, once or twice, that he was not quite the sort of person I would like for an enemy; but that was in reference to no act of his, and only a fancy of my own. For myself, I can live with any one who is disposed to live with me, and love peace and good-will better than anything in the world.

We had now grown so expert, that we resolved to better ourselves and return to London, which we did somewhere about the end of February, or the beginning of March, eighteen hundred and fifty-five. We put up at a little inn in the Borough; and, before a week was over, found ourselves engaged by Mr. James Rice of the "Belvidere Tavern," at a salary of seven pounds a week. Now, this was a great advance upon all our previous gains; and the Tavern was by no means a

bad place for the founding of a theatrical reputation.

Situated half-way between the West-end and the City, surrounded by a densely populated neighbourhood, and lying in the very path of the omnibuses, this establishment was one of the most prosperous of its class. There was a theatre, and a concert-room, and a garden, where dancing, and smoking, and rifle-shooting, and supper-eating were going on from eight till twelve o'clock every night all through the summer, which made the place a special favourite with the working-classes.

Here, then, we were engaged (Griffiths and I), with a promise that our salary should be raised if we proved attractive; and raised it soon was, for we drew enormously. We brought out the perche and the ceiling business; came down, in the midst of fireworks, from a platform higher than the roof of the theatre; and, in short, did everything that ever yet was done in our line—ay, and did

it well, too, though perhaps it is not my place to say so. At all events, the great coloured posters were pasted up all over the town; and our salary was increased to fifteen pounds a week; and the gentleman who writes about the plays in the Sunday Snub, was pleased to observe that there was no performance in London half so wonderful as that of the Patagonian Brothers; for which I take this opportunity to thank him kindly.

We lodged (of course together) in a quiet street on a hill near Islington. The house was kept by Mrs. Morrison, a respectable, industrious woman, whose husband had been a gasfitter at one of the theatres, and who was now left a widow with one only daughter just nineteen years of age. She was very good and very pretty. She was christened Alice, but her mother called her Ally, and we soon fell into the same habit; for they were very simple, friendly people, and we were soon as good friends as if we had all

been living together in the same house for years.

I am not a good hand at telling a story, as, I daresay, you have found out by this time—and, indeed, I never did sit down to write one out before—so I may as well come to the point at once, and confess that I loved her. I also fancied, before many weeks were over, that she did not altogether dislike me; for a man's wits are twice as sharp when he is in love, and there is not a blush, or a glance, or a word, that he does not contrive to build some hope upon. So one day, when Griffiths was out, I went downstairs to the parlour, where she was sitting by the window, sewing, and took a chair beside her.

"Ally, my dear," said I, stopping her right hand from working, and taking it up in both of mine; "Ally, my dear, I want to speak to you."

She blushed, and turned pale, and blushed

again, and I felt the pulses in her little soft hand throbbing like the heart of a frightened bird, but she never answered a syllable.

"Ally, my dear," said I, "I am a plain man. I am thirty-two years of age. I don't know how to flatter like some folks, and I have had but very little book-learning to speak of. But, my dear, I love you; and though I don't pretend that you are the first girl I ever fancied, I can truly say that you are the first I ever cared to make my wife. So, if you'll take me, such as I am, I'll be a true husband to you as long as I live."

What answer she made, or whether she spoke at all, is more than I can undertake to tell, for my ideas were all confused; but I only remember that I kissed her, and felt very happy, and that, when Mrs. Morrison came into the room, she found me with my arm clasped round my darling's waist.

I scarcely know when it was that I first noticed the change in John Griffiths; but

that it was somewhere about this time, I am tolerably certain. It is hard to put looks into words, and to make account of trifles that, after all, are matters of feeling more than matters of fact; but others saw the change as well as myself, and no one could help observing that he grew to be more silent and unsociable than ever. He kept away from home as much as possible. He spent all his Sundays out, starting away the first thing after breakfast, and not coming back again till close upon midnight. He even put an end to our old friendly custom of walking home together after our night's work was over, and joined a sort of tap-room club that was kept by a dozen or so of idle fellows belonging to the theatre. Worse than this, he scarcely exchanged a word with me from morning till night, even when we were at meals. He watched me about the room as if I had been a thief. And sometimes, though I am sure I never wronged him willingly in my life, I

caught him looking at me from under those black brows of his, as if he hated me.

More than once I laid my hand upon his sleeve as he was hurrying away on Sundays, or turning off towards the club room at night, and said, "Griffiths, have you got anything against me?"—or, "Griffiths, won't you come home to a friendly glass with me to-night?" But he either shook me off without a word, or muttered some sulky denial that sounded more like a curse than a civil answer; so I got tired of peace-making at last, and let him go his own way, and choose his own company.

The summer was already far advanced, and our engagement at the Belvidere had well-nigh ended, when I began to buy the furniture, and Ally to prepare her wedding things. Matters continued the same with John Griffiths; but, when the day was fixed, I made up my mind to try him once again, and invite him to the church and the dinner. The cir-

cumstances of that invitation are as clear in my memory as if the whole affair had taken place this morning.

It was on the twenty-ninth of July (I am particular about dates), and there had been a general call to rehearsal at one o'clock that day. The weather was warm and hazy, and I started early that I might not go in late or tired; for I knew that, what with the rehearsal, and the new piece, and the Terrific Descent, I should have enough to do before my day's work was over. The consequence was that I arrived about twenty minutes too soon. The gardens had a dreary look by daylight; but they were pleasanter, anyhow, than the theatre; so I loitered up and down among the smoky trees, and watched the waiters polishing the stains off the tables in the summer-houses, and thought how shabby the fountains looked when they were not playing, and what miserable gim-crack concerns were the Stalactite Caves and the Cosmoramic Grottoes, and

all the other attractions which looked so fine by the light of coloured lamps and fire-works.

Well, just as I was sauntering on, turning these things over in my mind, whom should I see in one of the summer-houses but John Griffiths! He was lying forward upon the table, with his face resting upon his clasped hands, sound asleep. An empty ale-bottle and glass stood close beside him, and his stick had fallen near his chair. I could not be mistaken in him, though his face was hidden; so I went up and touched him smartly on the shoulder.

"A fine morning, John?" says I. "I thought I was here early; but it seems that you were before me, after all."

He sprang to his feet at the sound of my voice, as if he had been struck, and then turned impatiently away.

"What did you wake me for?" he said, sullenly.

"Because I have news to tell you. You

know that the sixth of August will be our last night here. . . . . Well, mate, on the seventh, please God, I'm going to be married, and. . . . "

"Curse you!" he interrupted, turning a livid face upon me, and an eye that glared like a tiger's. "Curse you! How dare you come to me with that tale, you smooth-faced hound?—to me, of all men living?"

I was so little prepared for this burst of passion, that I had nothing to say; and so he went on:

"Why can't you let me alone? What do you tempt me for? I've kept my hands off of you till now . . . ."

He paused and bit his lip, and I saw that he was trembling from head to foot. I am no coward—it's not likely that I should be a Patagonian Brother if I was. But the sight of his hatred seemed to turn me, for the moment, quite sick and giddy.

"My God!" said I, leaning up against

the table, "what do you mean? Are you mad?"

He made no answer; but looked straight at me, and then walked away. I don't know how it was; but from that moment I knew all. It was written, somehow, in his face.

"Oh! Ally, dear!" I said to myself with a kind of groan, and sat down on the nearest bench; I believe that, at that moment, I scarcely knew where I was, or what I was doing.

I did not see him again till we met on the stage, about an hour afterwards, to go through our scene in the rehearsal. It was a grand piece, with a great deal of firing, and real water, and a live camel in the last act; and Griffiths and I were Mozambique slaves, performing before the Rajah in the Hall of Candelabras. Excepting that it cost a great deal of money, that is all I ever knew about the plot; and,

upon my word, I don't believe that anybody else knew much more. By this time I had, of course, recovered my usual composure; but I could see that Griffiths had been drinking, for his face was flushed and his balance unsteady. When the rehearsal was over, Mr. Rice called us into his private room and brought out a decanter of sherry, with which, I must say, he was always as liberal as any gentleman could be.

"Patagonians," says he, for he had a wonderfully merry way with him, and always called us by that name, "I suppose you would make no objection to a little matter of extra work and extra pay on the sixth—just to end the season with something stunning—hey?"

"No, no, sir, not we," replied Griffiths, in a sort of hearty manner that wasn't natural to him. "We're ready for anything. Is it the flying business you spoke about the other day?"

"Better than that," said the manager, filling up the glasses. "It's a new French feat that has never yet been done in this country, and they call it the trapeze. Patagonians, your health!"

So we drank his in return, and Mr. Rice explained all about it. It was to be an exhibition of posturing and a balloon ascent both in one. At some distance below the car was to be secured a triangular wooden framework, which framework was called the trapeze. From the lower pole, or base of this triangle, one of us was to be suspended, with a ligature of strong leather attached to his ankle, in case of accidents. Just as the balloon was rising and this man ascending head-downwards, the other was to catch him by the hands and go up also, having, if he preferred it, some band or other to bind him to his companion. In this position we were then to go through our customary performances, continuing them so long as the balloon remained in sight.

"All this," said Mr. Rice, "sounds much more dangerous than it really is. The motion of a balloon through the air is so steady and imperceptible, that, but for the knowledge of being up above the housetops, you will perform almost as comfortably as in the gardens. Besides, I am speaking to brave men who know their business, and are not to be dashed by a trifle—hey, Patagonians?"

Griffiths brought his hand down heavily upon the table, and made the glasses ring again.

"I'm ready, sir," said he, with an oath. "I'm ready to do it alone, if any man here is afraid to go with me!"

He looked at me as he said this, with a sort of mocking laugh that brought the blood up into my face.

"If you mean that for me, John," said I, quickly, "I'm no more afraid than yourself; and, if that's all about it, I'll go up to-night!"

If I was to try from now till this day next year, I never could describe the expression that came over his face as I spoke those words. It seemed to turn all the currents of my blood. I could not understand it then—but I understood it well enough afterwards.

Well, Mr. Rice was mightily pleased to find us so willing, and a very few more words ended the matter. Mr. Staines and his famous Würtemberg balloon were to be engaged; fifteen hundred additional coloured lamps were to be hired, and Griffiths and I were to receive twelve pounds a-piece for the evening, over and above our general salary.

Poor Ally! In the midst of the excitement I had forgotten her, and it was not till I was out of the theatre and walking slowly homewards that I remembered she must be told. For my own part, I did not believe there was the slightest danger; but I knew how her fears would magnify everything, and

the nearer I came towards Islington the more uncomfortable I felt. After all, I was such a coward—for I always am a coward where women are concerned—that I could not tell her that day, nor even the next; and it was only on Sunday, when we were sitting together after dinner, that I found courage to speak of it. I had expected something of a scene; but I had no idea that she would have taken on as she did, and I declare that, even then, if the posters had not been already out and myself bound in honour to act up to my engagement, I would have gone straight to Mr. Rice and declined the business altogether. Poor little, soft-hearted darling! it was a sore trial to her and to me also, and I was an inconsiderate idiot not to have thought of her feelings in the first instance. But there was no help for it now; so I gave her the only consolation in my power, by solemnly promising that I would be the first man tied to the trapeze. It was, of course, the safest po-

sition, and when I had assured her of this, she grew calmer. On all other points I kept my own counsel, as you may be certain; and as to John Griffiths, I saw less of him than ever. He even took his meals in the city now, and, during the seven days that elapsed between the twenty-ninth and the sixth, never once came face to face with me, except upon the stage.

I had a hard matter to get away from home when the afternoon of the sixth came round. My darling clung about me as if her heart would break, and although I did my best to cheer her, I don't mind confessing now that I went out and cried a tear or two in the passage.

"Keep up your spirits, Ally dear," says I, smiling and kissing her the last thing before I left the house. "And don't be spoiling your pretty eyes in that way. Remember that I want you to look well, and that we are to be married to-morrow."

The multitude in the Belvidere Gardens was something wonderful. There they were, men, women, and children, thronging the balconies, the orchestra stairs, and every available inch of ground; and there, in the midst of them, rolled and swayed the huge Würtemberg balloon, like a sleepy, lolling giant. The ascent was fixed for six o'clock, that we might come down again by daylight; so I made haste to dress, and then went to the green-room to see after Mr. Rice, and hear something of what was going forward.

Mr. Rice was there, and three gentlemen with him, namely, Colonel Steward, Captain Crawford, and Sydney Baird, Esquire. They were fine handsome-looking gentlemen, all three—especially Sydney Baird, Esquire, who was, as I have since been told, a play-writer, and one of the cleverest men of the day. I was going to draw back when I saw them sitting there with their wine and cigars; but they would have me in to take a glass of port,

and shook hands with me all round as polite as possible, and treated me as handsome as any gentlemen could.

"Here's health and success to you, my brave fellow," says Colonel Steward, "and a pleasant trip to us all!" and then I found that they were going up in the car with Mr. Staines.

And now, what with their light cheerful ways and pleasant talking, and what with the glass of wine that I had taken, and the excitement, and the hum of voices from the crowd outside, I was in first-rate spirits, and as impatient to be off as a racer at the starting-point. Presently one of the gentlemen looked at his watch.

"What are we waiting for?" said he. "It is ten minutes past six already."

And so it was. Ten minutes past the hour, and Griffiths had not yet been seen or heard of. Well, Mr. Rice grew very uneasy, and the crowd very noisy, and so twenty minutes more

went by. Then we made up our minds to go without him, and Mr. Rice made a little speech and explained it to the people; and then there was a cheer, and a great bustle; and the gentlemen took their seats in the car; and a hamper full of champagne and cold chicken was put in with them; and I was made fast by one leg to the base of the trapeze; and Mr. Staines was just about to get in himself, and give the signal to cut loose, when whom should we see forcing his way through the crowd but Griffiths.

Of course there was another cheer at this, and a delay of eight or ten minutes more while he was dressing. At last he came, and it was now just a quarter to seven o'clock. He looked very sullen when he found that he was to be the undermost; but there was no time to change anything now, even if I had been willing; so his left wrist and my right were bound together by a leathern strap, the signal was given, the band struck up, the

crowd applauded like mad, and the balloon rose straight and steady above the heads of the people.

Down sank the trees and the fountains, and the pavement of upturned faces. Down sank the roof of the theatre, and fainter grew the sound of the hurrahing and the music. The sensation was so strange, that for the first moment I was forced to close my eyes, and felt as if I must fall, and be dashed to pieces. But that soon passed away, and by the time we had risen to about three hundred feet I was as comfortable as if I had been born and bred in the air with my head downwards.

Presently we began our performances. Griffiths was as cool as possible—I never saw him cooler—and we went through every conceivable attitude; now swinging by our hands, now by our feet, now throwing summersaults one over the other. And during the whole of this time the streets and squares seemed to sink away to the right, and the

noises from the living world died on the air—and, as I turned and slung, changing my position with every minute, I caught strange flitting glimpses of the sunset and the city, the sky and the river, the gentlemen leaning over the car and the tiny passengers swarming down below like ants on an ant-hill.

Then the gentlemen grew tired of leaning over, and began to talk and laugh, and busy themselves over their hamper. Then the Surrey hills drew nearer, and the city sank away to the right, farther and farther. Then there were nothing but green fields with lines of railways crossing them here and there; and presently it grew quite damp and misty, and we ceased to see anything, except through breaks and openings in the clouds.

"Come, John," says I, "our share of this business is done. Don't you think we might as well be getting into the car?"

He was hanging below just then, holding on by my two hands, and had been hanging so

quite quiet for some minutes. He didn't seem to hear me; and no wonder, for the clouds were gathering about us so thickly, that even the voices of the gentlemen up above grew muffled, and I could hardly see for a yard before me in any direction. So I called to him again, and repeated the question.

He made no answer, but shifted his grasp from my hand to my wrist, and then up to the middle of my arm, so raising himself by degrees, till our faces came nearly on a level. There he paused, and I felt his hot breath on my cheek.

"William Waldur," said he hoarsely, "wasn't to-morrow to have been your wedding-day?"

Something in the tone of his voice, in the question, in the dusk and dreadful solitude, struck me with horror. I tried to shake off his hands, but he held too fast for that.

"Well, what if it was?" said I after a mo-

ment. "You needn't grip so hard. Catch hold of the pole, will you ? and let go of my arms."

He gave a short hard laugh, but never stirred.

"I suppose we're about two thousand feet high," says he, and it seemed to me that he had something between his teeth. "If either of us was to fall, he'd be a dead man before he touched the ground."

I would have given the world at that moment to be able to see his face; but what with my own head being downwards, and all his weight hanging to my arms, I had no more power than an infant.

"John !" I exclaimed, "what do you mean ? Catch hold of the pole, and let me do the same. My head's on fire !"

"Do you see this ?" said he, catching my arms a couple of inches higher up, and looking right into my face. "Do you see this ?"

It was a large, open clasp-knife, and he

was holding it with his teeth. His breath seemed to hiss over the cold blade.

"I bought it this evening—I hid it in my belt—I waited till the clouds came round and there was no soul to see. Presently I shall cut you away from the balloon. I took an oath that you should never have her, and I mean to keep it."

A dimness came over my eyes, and everything grew red. I felt that in another minute I should be insensible. He thought I was so already, and, letting my arms free, made a spring at the pole overhead.

That spring saved me. Our wrists were bound together, and as he rose he drew me along with him; for I was so faint and giddy that I could make no effort for myself.

I saw him hold by the pole with his left hand; I saw him take the knife in his right; I felt the cold steel pass between his wrist and mine, and then . . . .

And then, the horror of the moment gave

me back my strength, and I clung to the framework just as the thong gave way.

We were separated now, and I was still secured to the trapeze by one ankle. He had only his arms to trust to—and the knife.

Oh, the deadly, deadly strife that followed! it sickens me to think of it. His only hope now lay in the cursed weapon; and so clinging to the wood-work with one hand, he strove to stab me with the other.

It was life or death now, and I grew desperate. To feel his murderous clutch upon my throat, and, in the silence of the hideous struggle, to hear the report of a champagne cork, followed by a peal of careless laughter, overhead . . . . Oh, it was worse than death, a hundred times over!

I cannot tell how long we clung thus, each with a hand upon the other's throat. It may have been only a few seconds; but it seemed like hours to me. The question was simply which should be strangled first.

Presently his gripe relaxed, his lips became dead-white, and a shudder ran through every fibre of his body. He had turned giddy!

Then a cry burst from him—a cry like nothing human. He made a false clutch at the trapeze, and reeled over. I caught him, just in time, by the belt round his waist.

"It's all over with me," he groaned between his set teeth. "It's all—over—with me! Take your revenge!"

Then his head fell heavily back, and he hung, a dead weight, on my arm.

I did take my revenge; but it was hard work, and I was already half exhausted. How I contrived to hold him up, to unbind my foot, and to crawl, so laden, up the ropes, is more than I can tell; but my presence of mind never failed me for an instant, and I suppose the excitement gave me a sort of false strength while it lasted. At all events, I did it, though I now only remember climbing over

the basket-work, and seeing the faces of the gentlemen all turned upon me as I sank to the bottom of the car, scarcely more alive than the burthen in my arms.

He is a penitent man now, an Australian settler, and, as I am told, well to do in those parts.

This is my story, and I have no more to tell.

CHAPTER II.

MY DIAMOND STUDS.

"Diamonds of a most praised water."—PERICLES.

"SIR," said the stranger, "those studs are mine."

We were alone together, face to face. The train was flying on at the rate of thirty miles an hour. It was already verging towards evening, and we were about halfway between Liege and Brussels.

I shrank back into the farthest corner of my little compartment, and stared at him. His hair was dark, and hung in long loose locks; his eyes were wild and brilliant; and he wore an

ample cloak with a high fur-collar. I thought the man must be mad, and I turned cold all over.

"Did you speak, sir?" I found courage to say.

"I spoke, sir. You wear a set of studs—diamonds set in coloured gold—very graceful design—stones of an excellent water; but—they are not yours."

"Not mine, sir?"

The stranger nodded.

I had purchased them only a week before. They captivated me from the window of a jeweller's shop in Berlin; and they cost me —no, I dare not say what they cost me, for fear my wife should chance to see this statement.

I took out my pocket-book, and handed the bill to the stranger.

"Sir," I said, "be pleased to read this little paper, and convince yourself that the studs are mine, and mine only."

He just glanced it over, and returned it to me.

"I see," he said, shrugging his shoulders, "that they appear to be yours by right of purchase; but nevertheless they belong to me by right of inheritance. I can make this clear to you very easily, if you choose to hear my story; and no doubt we shall presently contrive some plan by which to settle the question of ownership."

My heart sank within me at the cool certainty of his voice and countenance.

"Shall I go on?" he asked, lighting a cigar.

"Oh, by all means," I replied. "I shall be delighted."

He smiled ominously to himself; then sighed and shook his head; passed his fingers twice or thrice through his long locks; crossed his feet deliberately on the opposite cushions; and fixing his eyes full upon me, thus began:

"Though a native of Russia, and born in

St Petersburgh, I am of Hindoo descent. My grandfather belonged to the province of Hyderabad; but, travelling thence while yet a young man, established himself at Balaghaut, and became a worker in the great diamond-mines commonly known as the mines of Golconda. A grave, silent, unsociable man was my grandfather, and little beloved by his fellow-miners. The superintendent, however, placed great confidence in him; and by-and-by, being promoted to the situation of overseer, he married. The only offspring of this union was Adjai Ghosal, my father. The Hindoos, as you must be aware, place a high value upon learning; and even the poorest evince such a respect for education as would do honour to the working-classes of a more enlightened community. Of this feeling no man in his position partook more largely than my grandfather. Uninstructed himself, he was ardently desirous that his son should benefit by advantages which, generally speak-

ing, were accessible only to the wealthy; and in pursuance of this ambition, sent Adjai Ghosal, at the age of eleven years, to a large native academy at Benares. People wondered at first, and asked each other what the thing meant, and where the overseer found means to do it. 'Have you found a lac of rupees lately?' inquired one. 'Do you intend to make a diamond-merchant of the little Adjai?' asked another. But my grandfather only held his peace; and after a time the marvel died away, and was forgotten. And thus eleven more years passed on; and my father, at the age of twenty-two, was summoned home to Balaghaut to receive the last benediction of his expiring parent. He found the old man stretched upon a mat, and almost speechless.

"'Adjai,' he murmured,—'Adjai, my son, thou art arrived in time—in good time; for I could not have borne to die without seeing thee.'

"My father pressed his hand in silence, and turned his face aside.

"'Adjai,' said my grandfather, 'I have a terrible secret to confide to thee; one which my soul refuses to carry to the grave. Canst thou endure to hear it?'

"My father urged him to speak.

"'It is to my own shame to reveal it to thee, Adjai; but I bow my head to the punishment. My son, I have sinned.'

"My father became more curious than ever.

"'Thou wilt not despise my memory, Adjai?'

"'By Brahma, no!' said my father, raising his hand to his head.

"'Then hearken.'

"The old miner lifted himself upon his elbow, and collected all his strength. My father knelt down and listened.

"'It happened,' said my grandfather, 'just three-and-twenty years ago, and I was then but a working-miner. I chanced one

day upon a vein of extraordinary richness. My son, I was tempted. The evil one took possession of my soul—I secreted five diamonds. One was incalculably valuable—larger than a walnut, and, as far as I could judge, of admirable water. The other four were about the size of peas. Alas, Adjai! from that hour I was a miserable man. Many and many a time, I was on the point of confessing the theft; and was as frequently deterred by shame, fear, avarice, or ambition. I married; and a year after my marriage thou wert born. Then I resolved to dedicate this wealth to thee, and thee alone; to educate thee; to enrich thee; to make thee prosperous and learned; and never, never to profit in my own person by my sin.'

"'Generous parent!' exclaimed my father, enthusiastically.

"'When I took thee to Benares, Adjai,' continued my grandfather, 'I sold one of the four smaller diamonds; and with this I have

defrayed the expenses of thy education. I never spent one fraction of the sum upon myself; and some few golden mohurs of it are yet remaining.'

"'Indeed!' said my father, who was listening with the greatest attention. 'And the rest of the gems?'

"'The rest of the gems, Adjai, thou canst restore when I am gone.'

"'Restore!' echoed my father.

"'Yes, my child. Thou hast education. It will make thee far happier than the possession of ill-gotten riches; and I shall die in peace, knowing that reparation will be made. As for the few remaining mohurs, I think, if thou art not over-scrupulous in the matter, thou mightest almost be justified in keeping them. They will help thee to begin the world.'

"'Indeed!" said my father, with a curious sort of smile flitting about the corners of his mouth.

"At this moment the old man changed colour, and a shudder passed over him.

"'I—I have told thee just in time, Adjai,' he said falteringly. 'I feel that—that I have not many moments to live. Come hither, that I may give thee my blessing.'

"'My dear father,' said Adjai Ghosal, 'you have forgotten to tell me where the diamonds are hidden.'

"'True,' gasped the dying man. 'Thou wilt find them, my son—thou wilt find them . . . but thou wilt be sure to restore them as soon as I am dead?'

"'How can I restore them,' said my father impatiently, 'unless you tell me where to find them?'

"'True—very true, my Adjai. Look, then, in the roll of matting which I use for a pillow, and there thou wilt find the three smaller gems and the large one. See—see the superintendent—Adjai—my—my . . .'

"A rapid convulsion, a moan, a heavy falling

back of the outstretched hands, and my grandfather was dead."

The stranger broke off abruptly in his story, and laid his hand upon my sleeve.

"And now, sir," said he, "what do you suppose my father did?"

"Went into mourning, perhaps," said I, deeply interested.

"Nonsense, sir. He went to the roll of matting."

"And found the diamonds?"

"Not only *found* them, sir," said the stranger, laying his finger on his nose,—"not only found them; but—can't you guess?"

"Well, really," said I hesitating, "I—that is—if I should not be offending you by the supposition, I should guess—that he kept them."

"*Kept them*, sir! that's it," said the stranger, rubbing his hands triumphantly; "and, in my opinion, he was quite right too. Well,

sir, to continue. As soon as my venerable ancestor had been consigned to the grave, my father left Balaghaut for Calcutta; and embarking there on board a Russian vessel, sailed for St. Petersburg. Arrived at that city, he consigned the gems to a skilful artist, by whom they were cut and polished. Sir, when cut and polished, it was found that the larger stone weighed no less than one hundred and ninety-three carats! My father knew that his fortune was made, and applied for an audience of the Empress Catherine II. The audience was granted, and the diamond shown; but the empress was unwilling to accede to my father's terms. He, believing that in time he should obtain his price, suffered the matter to drop; took a beautiful mansion overlooking the Neva; naturalised himself as a Russian subject, under the name of Peter Petroffski; and patiently bided his time. Thus nearly a twelvemonth passed; and my father, who had long since

parted with the last of his golden mohurs, began to feel nervous. The event proved, however, that he had done wisely; for he one morning received a summons to the palace of Count Orloff, and sold his diamond to that nobleman for the sum of one hundred and four thousand one hundred and sixty-six pounds, thirteen shillings, and fourpence. Count Orloff was then Catherine's favourite; and to her, on her birthday, he presented this royal gift, some few days after he had made the purchase."

"Is it possible," I exclaimed, almost breathless with astonishment,—"is it possible that these are all facts?"

"Facts!" echoed the stranger indignantly. "Turn to the article on diamonds in any Encyclopædia, and convince yourself. Facts, indeed! Why, sir, that inestimable gem now adorns the sceptre of Russia!"

"I beg your pardon," I said humbly; "pray go on, sir."

He seemed vexed, and remained silent; so I spoke again.

"In what year did this happen?"

"In the year 1772," he replied, falling back insensibly into his narrative. "My father now found himself in a position to command immense commercial influence; so he embarked a portion of his wealth in the fur trade, and became in process of time one of the foremost among the merchant-princes of Russia. During many years, he devoted himself entirely to the pursuit of riches; for gold, I must confess, was my father's weak point. At last, when he had obtained the reputation of being at the same time a millionnaire and an irreclaimable old bachelor, he married—married at sixty years of age, just thirty-eight years from the time when he left Balaghaut. The object of his choice was a rich widow, in every way suitable as regarded money and station; an excellent woman, and the best of mothers! I respect her memory."

Here the stranger paused, and wiped his eyes with a very fine cambric handkerchief, which filled the carriage with an overpowering perfume of patchouli. Presently, conquering his emotion, he resumed:—

"But for my birth, which took place within two years from the date of my father's wedding, the newly-created family of Petroffski must have become extinct. As it was, therefore, my appearance was hailed with extravagant rejoicings. I was christened after my father, Peter Petroffski. My schoolfellows called me Peter the Second. I remember little of my boyhood, excepting that I always had plenty of roubles in my pocket; a pony; a mounted servant to attend me to and from school; and plenty of indulgence from all my teachers. No boy in the academy played so many pranks, or was so readily forgiven as myself; but money covers a multitude of sins, especially at St. Petersburg."

He paused for a moment, and a question which had long suggested itself to my mind, now rose to my lips.

"You have not yet told me," said I, "what your father did with the three smaller diamonds."

"Sir," replied the stranger, "I am coming to that presently."

So I bowed and waited in silence.

"From school I went to college; and, as my father's position excluded me from the college of nobles, I travelled into Germany, and studied for five years at the University of Heidelberg."

"'Peter,' said my father, as we parted, 'remember what a priceless life is yours. Above all things, my darling son, be careful not to injure your health by over-application.'"

"Never was good advice more scrupulously followed. My studies at Heidelberg were pleasant rather than profound, and consisted

chiefly of rowing, drinking, and fighting. By dint of strict attention to these duties, I earned for myself the rank of a 'mossy head;' and, indeed, I may say that I graduated in Bavarian beer, and took out my degree in sabre-cuts. At length I reached the age of twenty-one, and returned to St. Petersburg just in time for my birthday. On this occasion my father threw his house open for a succession of dinner-parties, balls, and suppers. On the morning of the great day, he called me into his study, signifying that he had something to say, and something to give to me. A small morocco case of triangular form was lying on his desk. From the moment I entered the room I felt convinced that this was intended for me; and my attention, I fear, wandered sadly away from the wise and affectionate discourse which my father (leaning back complacently in his great arm-chair) was pleased to bestow upon me. He said a great deal about the extent of his trade, and the satisfaction it

was to him to have brought up a son who should succeed him in it; informed me that from this day I was to fill the position of junior partner, with a munificent share in the yearly profits; and finally, taking up the morocco case, bade me accept that as an earnest of his parental love. I opened it, and beheld a superb set of diamond studs. Each stone was a brilliant of the purest water, and about the size of an ordinary pea. Their value, I felt convinced, could not be less than three hundred guineas of your English money. For some moments I was speechless with delight and astonishment, and could scarcely stammer forth a word of thanks. Then my father smiled, and told me the history which I have just related to you. I had never heard anything of this before. I knew only the common story current in the city, that my father had been a great Eastern merchant before he settled in Russia, and that he had sold a wonderful diamond to the Empress Catherine many years

ago. If, therefore, I had been amazed before, I was now still more so, and listened to the narrative like a man in a dream.

"'And now, my dear boy,' said my father in conclusion, 'these diamonds, as I daresay you have already guessed, are the three remaining stones which I took from your grandfather's pillow of matting just sixty years ago.'

"From this time I led an enviable life. I owned the handsomest *droschky*, the finest horses, and the smallest tiger in St. Petersburg. My pleasure-yacht was the completest that lay alongside the quays of the Neva. My stall at the opera was next to that of young Count Skampsikoff, the great leader of fashion and folly, and close under the box of Prince Ruffantuff, who was at that time one of our most influential nobles, and Generalissimo of the Russian army. It was not long before Skampsikoff and I became the firmest friends in the world; and before six months were

over, I was known far and near as the fastest, the richest, and the most reckless scapegrace about town.

"It was at this period, sir, that I first beheld the peerless Katrina."

The stranger paused, as if he expected me to be surprised; but finding that I only continued to listen with a countenance indicative of polite attention, he looked at his watch, ran his fingers through his hair, hemmed twice or thrice, and then went on with his story.

"You will ask me, perhaps,—who was the peerless Katrina? Sir, she was a violet blooming upon a rock; a rainbow born out of the bosom of a thunder-cloud. She was the dream, the poetry, the passion of my life! Katrina, sir, was the only child of Prince Ruffantuff, whose name I have already mentioned. Strange that the fairest, the most ethereal of beings, should come of so stern a parentage! As Katrina was the gentlest of

women, and the most loving, so was Ivan Ruffantuff the fiercest of soldiers and the severest of fathers. He carried the discipline of the camp into the privacy of his home, and made himself dreaded as much by his household as by his troops. I never saw so forbidding a countenance, or one more expressive of pride and defiance. Gazing upon the delicate creature seated beside him in his box, one wondered how nature could have played so strange a turn, and sought in vain for the faintest trace of apparent consanguinity between them. Prince Ivan was a giant in stature; Katrina was almost childlike in the graceful slightness of her proportions. Prince Ivan was swarthy of complexion, and his features were moulded after the flat unintellectual type of the Tartar tribes; Katrina's features were regular, classical, and Greek. Prince Ivan was proud and cruel; Katrina was loving, innocent—born for all purposes of tenderness and womanly compassion.

What marvel, then, that I loved her? Loved her, sir, as only few can love—loved her with all the force, and self-abandonment, and passion, of which man's nature is capable. I had never been in earnest before, but I was in earnest now—hopelessly in earnest, as I well knew; but despair itself fed my love with fresh energy, and obstacles only served to make me more determined. For a long time I loved her with my eyes and heart alone, as a devotee worships a saint upon an altar. I could but gaze upon her from afar. I had never even listened to the sound of her dear voice, though I would have died only to hear her pronounce my name. Night after night, during the whole opera-season, I sat and watched her from my stall. I heard no more of the music than if I had been in Siberia; I grew thin, and pale, and abstracted; I fell into a listless dreaming mood, and replied at random when spoken to; above all, I wandered like a ghost in and out of the

salons and gaming-rooms, where I had of late been so eager in the pursuit of pleasure. At last Skampsikoff came to my rooms one morning, and remonstrated with me upon my unaccountable despondency.

"'You don't do justice to *me*, my dear fellow,' he said, twirling his moustachios. "I have introduced you, set you going, made you, in point of fact, the fashion; and I take it rather unkindly that you should reflect so glaring a discredit upon my judgment. You might as well be at La Trappe, as far as your conversational powers go at present; and as for your looks, why, hang it, you know the least a man can do for society is to look pleasant. Are you in debt, or does the dear papa draw his purse-strings too closely?'

"I shook my head. I had no debts but such as I could readily liquidate, and my father was as liberal to me as I could reasonably desire. It was not that.

"'Not that!' exclaimed Skampsikoff, 'well,

then, you must be in love. Why, man, you blush! The thing's as clear as the sunlight; and Peter, the magnificent Peter, is in love! Now, by all the saints, this is too ridiculous! Who's the girl?'

"'The Princess Katrina," I answered with a groan.

"Skampsikoff started, and whistled dismally.

"'The Princess Katrina!' he repeated.

"I laid my head down upon the table, and burst into tears.

"'I know that I am a fool,' I said, sobbing. 'I know that I have no chance—no hope—no resource but exile or death; and yet I love her, oh, I love her, and I am dying—dying—dying, day by day!'

"My friend was moved.

"'Cheer up, Petroffski,' he said, laying his hand upon my shoulder. 'Cheer up; for I think I know of a plan by which to gain you an interview with her; and that once done, why, you must accomplish the rest for your-

self. You will throw yourself at her feet. You will propose an elopement, or a secret marriage. She will not have the heart to refuse you. We will set relays of horses for you on the road to the nearest seaport; you will embark on board a schooner, ready hired for the purpose; and, once off and away, who is to follow? Come, come, I see nothing but success for you; and if you will but look a trifle more lively, I'll set out at once to see about the ways and means.'

"I felt as if night had turned to day on hearing these words.

"'Skampsikoff,' I said, 'you have saved my life!'

"That evening, to my surprise, I saw him enter Prince Ruffantuff's box in company with a nobleman of his acquaintance, and be presented in due form both to Ivan and his daughter. He did not remain there very long, but contrived to enter into conversation with Katrina. Just before he left the box,

he nodded to me and waved his hand. She instantly raised her glass. They exchanged a few sentences. She looked again; and I felt as if the whole theatre were turning round. In a few moments he had made his bow, taken his leave, and returned to his stall by my side.

"'The ball is rolling,' he said, rubbing his hands gaily; 'the ball is rolling, and the game's begun. She saw me recognise you, and naturally asked me who you were. 'A fellow,' said I, 'with the best heart and the handsomest studs in St. Petersburg.' 'Of horses?' asked the fair Katrina. 'No,' said I; 'of diamonds.' Whereupon she looked again. 'Not but that he has horses, too,' I added, 'and plenty of them. He's a noble fellow, and my most intimate friend; but he is far from happy.' She surveyed you with more interest than ever. There's nothing like telling a woman that a man's unhappy. She's sure to be half in love with him directly. 'He

looks pale,' said the fair Katrina. 'What is the cause of his sorrow?' I smiled and shook my head. 'Princess Katrina,' I said meaningly, "*you* are the very last person in the world to whom I could confide that secret.' With this I took my leave; and I think you ought to be very much obliged to me.'

"And I was very much obliged to him, especially when I saw that Katrina's attention wandered continually that evening from the stage to myself. Once or twice our eyes met. The first time she started; the second time, she blushed; and I thought myself the happiest fellow in the world.

"Henceforth, life assumed for me a new and beautiful aspect. Somehow or another (whether through the hints dropped by my friend, or her own attentive study of my eloquent glances, I know not) the fair Katrina became aware of my passion, and was not so cruel as to discourage it. Sometimes, when they stood near me in the crush-room, she

would drop her handkerchief or her fan, that I might have the opportunity of handing it to her. Sometimes she left a flower from her bouquet lying upon the front of her box, that I might go round and take it when she and her father were gone. At last she accorded me an interview."

The stranger buried his face in his hands, and sighed heavily.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, in a broken voice. "My—my emotions on recalling this portion of my history are so overwhelming, that (with your permission) I must smoke a cigar."

I have, be it known, a particular aversion to the odour of tobacco. To speak plainly, it disagrees with me. However, in this instance I waved my objections; the stranger lit his Havanna; and presently the story of my diamond-studs went on.

"Those only who have loved," said the

stranger, "can picture the condition of my mind during the hours that preceded that eventful interview. I could think of nothing, speak of nothing, but Katrina. To me the universe was all Katrina, and there was only nothingness beyond. Dusk came at last—the dusk of a winter's evening, when the tinkling bells of the *droschky*-horses, and the guttural 'Yukh, yukh!' of the drivers, rose from the streets and public squares, where the snow lay thick. Then dusk turned rapidly to night; the frosty stars came out; and I wrapped myself in my cloak of furs, and went forth alone on foot.

"Swiftly and silently I traversed the few thoroughfares that separated our dwellings; and, gliding along by the wall at the back of Prince Ivan's gardens, stationed myself in a deep angle of shadow, and waited patiently. Presently a small side-door opened, and an old woman, closely muffled, looked out.

"'What art thou doing there?' she asked in a shrill tremulous tone.

"'Waiting for the sun to shine,' I replied in the words of the signal which we had previously agreed upon.

"The woman extended her hand to me, led me in, closed the door, and so guided me in utter darkness through a long passage. Presently I saw a thread of brilliant light; then a door was thrown suddenly open, and I found myself in a brilliantly lighted apartment. Here my conductress desired me to wait, and hobbled out of the room. A quarter of an hour elapsed thus. I counted the seconds by a time-piece on a console-table; but every minute seemed to be the length of an hour. At last the door opened. I turned—I fell at her feet—it was Katrina!

"For some moments neither of us spoke. I do not now recollect which first broke the delicious silence; but I believe it was myself. The remembrance of what was said has alto-

gether passed away from me. It seems to me now like a dream, or the dream of a dream, so bright, so far away, so unsubstantial!

"There was a fauteuil close at hand. I placed her in it; I knelt down before her; I bent my head upon her knees, and covered her little hands with kisses. And so we told each other the story of our love,—a broken, faltering story, interrupted by exclamations and questions, tears and kisses; but the sweetest that is told by human lips.

"Suddenly,—while I was yet kneeling at her feet, while my arm clasped her waist, and one of her dear hands rested on my head,—we heard voices close at hand.

"'Her Highness,' said one, 'is in her boudoir overlooking the terrace.'

"'Good,' replied another, at which we both shuddered. 'You need not announce me.'

"'Alas!' cried Katrina, in an agony of terror, 'it is my father!"

love, of despair, of cursing; I threw myself upon the ground beside her, and strove to stay the purple stream that gushed from her bosom. Alas, it was in vain! Before the smoke had cleared away, before Ivan himself well knew the deed he had committed, all was over, and the beautiful Katrina had passed away to that heaven for—for which——"

The stranger's voice faltered, and, letting down the window next to him, he leaned out for a few minutes in the evening air. When he drew in his head again, I offered him my pocket-flask of brandy. He emptied it at a draught, returned it to me with a long-drawn sigh, threw away the end of his cigar, and resumed:—

"You will forgive me, sir, if I hasten over this portion of my narrative. It is of a nature so agonising to my feelings, that I must content myself with merely stating a few leading facts, and passing on to subsequent events. Prince Ivan, struck with remorse

and horror, solicited the emperor's leave to retire from the army, and entered a monastery near Moscow. I received an intimation from the Government that I should do well to travel for the next eight or ten years. It was a polite form of exile, to which I was compelled to accede, greatly to the sorrow of my parents. For my own part, I was utterly heart-broken, and cared little what became of me. I went direct to Paris, and plunged into a course of reckless dissipation. Billiards, race-horses, dinner-parties, betting, and follies of every description, soon brought upon me the expostulations of my family. But I was careless of everything—of health, fortune, reputation,—all. When my father refused any longer to supply my wilful extravagances, I incurred innumerable debts, and, giving no heed to the consequence, spent and drank, and gambled still. At length, by some unaccountable chance, a rumour got about that my father had disinherited

me. From this moment I could find no more credit. My friends dropped off one by one; and, except by a few blacklegs, and two or three goodnatured chums, I found myself deserted by all my former companions. And still, such was my infatuation, instead of reforming — instead of meriting my father's aid and forgiveness—I only sank lower and lower, and continued to tread the downward path of vice.

"An event, however, occurred which altogether changed the course of my career. I had been dining with some wild fellows at the *Maison Dorée*. After dinner, when we were all very nearly intoxicated, we called as usual for cards and dice. I soon lost the contents of my purse; then I staked my cabriolet, and lost it; my favourite horse, and lost him; my watch, chain, and seals, and lost them. On this, somewhat startled, I paused.

"'I'll play no more to-night,' I said doggedly.

"'Pshaw!' cried my antagonist. 'Throw again; next time you'll be sure to win.'

"But I shook my head and rose from the table.

"'I'm a beggar already,' said I, with a forced laugh.

"De Lancy shrugged his shoulders.

"'As you please,' he replied somewhat contemptuously. 'I only wanted you to have your revenge.'

"I turned back irresolutely.

"'Will you play for my house and furniture?' I asked.

"'Willingly.'

"So I sat down again, and in a few throws more found myself homeless. This time I was reckless. I poured out a bumper of wine, and tossed it off at a draught.

"If I had a wife,' I cried madly, 'I would stake her next; but I have nothing left now,

gentlemen—nothing but wine, and liberty, and myself. As this is no slave-country, you won't play, I suppose, for the latter?'

"'Not I,' said De Lancy, sweeping his gains into his hat. 'I suppose you have no objection to make out that little statement of the house, cabriolet, and so forth, in writing, have you?'

"There was an easy, satisfied, sarcastic triumph in his tone that irritated me more than the loss of all the rest. I made no reply; but, tearing a leaf from my pocket-book, wrote hastily, and half threw the paper at him.

"'Take it, sir,' I said bitterly; 'and I wish you joy of your property.'

"He surveyed the acknowledgment coolly, put it in his purse, and said with a sneering smile:—

"'Does it not seem a pity now that you should have absolutely nothing left whereby to retrieve these things? Another throw, another billet of a hundred francs, and perhaps they would all be yours again. By the

way, you forgot your diamond studs all this time. Will you try once more?

"And he threw the dice as he spoke. They turned up sixes.

"'You might have thrown that, Petroffski,' he said, pointing to them.

"I was sorely tempted; but I resisted.

"'No, no,' I said, 'not my diamond studs. They are an heir-loom; and—and I will write to my father to-morrow.'

"'Like a penitent good little boy,' said De Lancy, with an impatient gesture. 'Nonsense, man; throw for the studs. I feel convinced you'll win.'

"'Say, rather, you feel convinced that *you'll* win, De Lancy. Have you not stripped me of enough already?'

"'Insolent!' he cried. 'Do you think I value the paltry winnings?'

"'I think you grasp all you can get.'

"'Liar!'

"The word had scarcely passed his lips,

when I flung a glass of wine in his face. In another moment all was confusion. Blows were exchanged, the table was overturned, the lights extinguished. I received a severe wound upon the temple from falling against the open door, and fainted.

"When I came to myself, I was stretched upon a sofa in an adjoining room, with a surgeon bending over me. The morning sun was streaming in at the windows. My companions were all gone, no one knew whither.

"'What is the matter,' I asked, faintly. 'Am I dying?'

"The surgeon shook his head.

"'You are severely hurt,' he said, 'but with care and quiet you will recover. Had I not better communicate with your friends?'

"'Write to my father,' I murmured. 'You will find his—his address in my pocket-book.'

"The surgeon took up pen and paper, and wrote immediately, partly from my dictation,

and partly from his opinion of my condition. He then said that I must not be moved, and must, above all things, avoid excitement. As he uttered these words, and rose to take his leave, a sudden idea, or, rather, a sudden presentiment, struck me.

"I put up my hand to my bosom. *My diamond-studs were gone!*

"After this, I remember no more. The shock produced upon me that very effect which the surgeon had been so anxious to avoid. I lost consciousness again; and on being restored to life, passed into a state of delirious fever. For many weeks I lay upon the threshold of the grave; and when I at length recovered, it was to find my dear father and mother at my side. They had hastened over with succour and forgiveness, and to their tender cares I owed a second existence. As soon as my health was tolerably established, my father went back for a few weeks to Russia, disposed of his business, realized his fortune in money,

and returned to France an independent man. This excellent parent did not long survive the change. Within two years from the period of his establishment in Paris he died; and my mother survived him only a few months. They left me to the enjoyment of a princely fortune, which former experience has taught me to use worthily. I neither drink nor gamble. I pass my life chiefly in travelling. I have never married, and I do not think it likely that I ever shall marry; for Katrina is ever present in my heart, and when I lost her, I lost the power of loving. Since that period, fifteen years have elapsed. I have wandered through many lands: trodden the ruins of Thebes, and waked the echoes of Pompeii; shot the buffalo on the Western prairies, and pursued the wild-boar amid the forests of Westphalia. I am now on my way to Denmark, but purpose remaining a few days in Brussels, where probably I shall have the pleasure of meeting you again."

that this is not a case of accidental resemblance, and . . . "

"Sir," interrupted the stranger, "when my father gave me those studs on my birthday, he caused my initials to be engraved in minute characters upon one of the facets at the back. To do this was a great expense. When done, it deteriorated, perhaps, from the market-value of the gems; but it made them infinitely more precious to me. If, sir, you will have the goodness to take them out of your shirt, I will show you the initials P. P. upon the under side."

By this time the train had reached the suburbs of Brussels, and in a few moments more we should arrive, I well knew, at the station.

"I think, sir," said I, "we had better defer this examination till to-morrow. We have almost gained our destination; and by the feeble light of this roof-lamp I—"

The stranger brought out a small silver-box filled with wax-matches.

"By the light of one of these convenient little articles, sir," he said, "I will engage that you shall see the letters. I am most anxious to convince you of the identity of the stones. Pray, oblige me by taking them out."

I could no longer find any pretence for refusal. The studs were attached each to each by a slender chain, and to examine one I was forced to take out all. As I was doing this, the speed of the train slackened.

The stranger lit one of his matches, and I examined the stones in tremulous impatience.

"Upon my honour, sir," I said, very earnestly, "I can perceive nothing upon them."

"Had you not better put on your glasses?" asked the stranger.

"*Bruxelles?*" shouted the guard. "*Changement de convoie pour Gand, Bruges, et Ostend.*"

Hang the glasses! they were so misty I could not see an inch before me.

"Allow me to hold the studs for you while you rub them up," said the stranger, politely.

I thanked him, polished the glasses upon my sleeve, held them up to the light, put them on.

"Now, sir," I said, "you may light another match, and give me the diamonds."

The stranger made no reply.

"I will not trouble you, sir, to hold them any longer," I said.

I turned; I uttered a shriek of dismay; I stumbled over my own portmanteau, which stood between me and the doorway.

"*Monsieur veut descendre?*" said the guard, with a grin.

"Where is the stranger?" I cried, leaping out, and dancing frantically about the platform. "Where is the stranger?—where is Peter Petroffski?—where are my diamond-studs?"

"Has monsieur lost anything?" asked the railway interpreter, touching his hat.

"He had my studs in his hand! I turned my back for a moment, and he was off! Did any one see him?"

"Will monsieur have the goodness to describe the person of this thief?"

"He was tall, thin, very dark, with black eyes and an aquiline nose."

"And long hair hanging down upon his shoulders?" asked the interpreter.

"Yes, yes."

"And he wore a large cloak with a high fur-collar?"

"The same—the very same."

The porters and bystanders smiled, and glanced meaningly at one another. The interpreter shrugged his shoulders.

"Every effort shall be made," he said, shaking his head; "but I regret to say that we have little prospect of success. This man's name is Vaudon. He is an experienced

swindler, and evades capture with surprising dexterity. It is not three weeks since he committed a similar robbery on this very line, and the police have been in pursuit of him ever since without effect."

"Then his name is not Peter Petroffski?"

"Certainly not, monsieur."

"And he is no Russian?"

"No more than I am."

"And—and his grandfather, who was a Hindoo—and the Empress Catherine—and the beautiful princess who was shot—and—and . . . "

"And monsieur may be assured," said the interpreter with a smile, "that whatever story was related to him by Pierre Vaudon was from beginning to end—a fiction!"

Quite chapfallen, I groaned aloud, and took my melancholy way to the Hôtel de Ville. There I stated my case, and was assured that no pains would be spared on the part of the police to apprehend the offender.

No pains were spared, and no money either; but all was in vain. From that day to this I never set eyes upon my diamond studs.

CHAPTER III.

THE GUARD-SHIP AT THE AIRE.

"AT Christmas time," said the stranger in the chimney-corner, "folks seem to think themselves privileged to ask other folks to tell stories; but then it is not every man's vocation to tell stories. It comes especially hard on a plain man, who makes no pretence of knowing more than his neighbours. I am a plain man, and it comes hard upon me. I never wrote a page in a magazine, or a paragraph in a newspaper, in my life. How, then, can I be expected to tell a story?"

Having said which, the stranger relapsed into silence, and stared moodily at the fire.

On this particular evening, being Christmas Eve, and rather stormy, with a strong wind and mist blowing up from the sea, our gathering at the "Tintagel Arms" was somewhat smaller than usual. The stranger had dropped in about two hours before, stabled his horse, engaged his bed, and installed himself in the chimney-corner as comfortably as if he had been an old inhabitant of the place, and one of ourselves. Up to this moment, however, he had scarcely opened his lips, or taken his eyes from off the logs that blazed upon the hearth. We looked at each other, and no one seemed prepared with a reply.

"Besides," added the stranger, as if it were an afterthought, and wholly unanswerable, "the days of 'Arabian Nights' are over. We want facts in these times—facts, gentlemen—facts."

"And surely there are facts in the life of every individual," observed the schoolmaster, "which, if truthfully related, could not fail, to

impart both instruction and amusement. We prefer facts, sir; when we can get them. Indeed, I dare affirm that within the four walls of this parlour, many a poor seaman has, with his rude narrative of travel and peril, given us more genuine pleasure than could the best author of the best fiction that ever was written."

(The schoolmaster, I should observe, is the orator of our little society. He has seen better days, is a classical scholar, and has, at times, quite a parliamentary style. We are proud of him up at the "Tintagel Arms;" and he knows it.)

"Then do you mean to tell me," said the stranger, testily, "that you impose this tax on every traveller who happens to put up at the house?"

"By no means, sir," replied the schoolmaster. "We only desire that every traveller who joins the society in this parlour should conform to the rules by which this society is

governed. There is the coffee-room for whoever may prefer it."

"And those rules?"

"And those rules are that each person present shall tell a story, sing a song, or read aloud for the amusement of the rest."

"Perhaps," suggested the landlord, "the gentleman would prefer to sing a song?"

"I can't sing," growled the traveller.

"Some visitors prefer to read a scene from Shakespeare," hinted the parish clerk.

"Might as well ask me to dance on the tight-rope," retorted the traveller, fiercely.

A dead silence ensued, in the midst of which the landlady brought in our customary bowl of punch, and the schoolmaster filled the glasses. The stranger tasted his punch, gave a nod of approval, drank the rest at a draught, and coughed uneasily.

"I can't sing," said he, after several minutes, during which no one had spoken; "and I can't read plays; and I can't tell

stories. But if plain facts will do, I don't mind telling the company about an—an adventure, I suppose I may call it, that happened to myself one Christmas Eve, some two-and-thirty years ago."

"Sir," said the schoolmaster, "we shall be delighted."

"That's more than I was," retorted the traveller; "for it was just the most disagreeable affair that I ever went through in my life."

With this, he sent up his glass to be refilled; and, continuing to stare steadily into the fire, as if he was reading every word of his narrative from the pictures in the embers, thus began:—

"I am a commercial traveller, and have been on the road these last five-and-thirty years; that is to say, ever since I was twenty years of age. Mine is the Manchester line of business, and I have travelled in most parts of England and Wales, as well as in some

parts of France and Germany, in my time. At the period of which I am about to speak, I was in the employment of Warren, Gray, and Company (then a famous Manchester firm of half a century's standing), and my beat lay through the north of France, all about those parts which lie between Calais, Paris, and Cherbourg—a wide district, in the form of a great irregular angle, as you may see by the map.

"Well, as I have said, it was two-and-thirty years ago; or, if you like it better, Anno Domini 1830. William IV. had just become King of England, and Louis Philippe had just become King of the French. It was an exciting time. The Continent was all over in a restless, revolutionary state; and France, divided between Orleanists and Bourbons, Napoleonists and Republicans, was in a worse condition of fever and ferment than any of her neighbours.

"I hate politics, gentlemen. I am no

politician now, and I was no politician then; but being a young fellow at that time, and better acquainted with the Continent than most Englishmen of my age and station (for people didn't travel abroad then as they do now), I gave myself great airs of superiority, and fancied I knew a vast deal about everything. When I was at home, I bragged about foreign life and manners; gave myself out as a wonderful judge of French wines; and loudly despised our homely English cookery. When I was abroad, on the contrary, I became violently national, boasted of British liberties, British arms, and British commerce, and never failed to avail myself, if possible, of a chance allusion to Wellington, or Nelson, or Waterloo. In short, as I said before, I loved to assume airs of superiority, and that disposition by no means helped to make me popular. I was a fool for my pains, of course; and I suffered for it afterwards . . . but I must not run in advance of my story.

"Having been in Paris (which, you will remember, was the farthest point inland of my district) all July and August, I began travelling northwards again in September, according to the commands of my employers. There was no Northern of France Railway at that time, and the traveller who was unprovided with his own vehicle had no choice between the lumbering diligence and the scarcely less lumbering *calèche*. I, however, had my own gig, which I had brought over from England, and a capital brown horse bought at Compiègne; and I well remember how I used to dash past the diligences, clatter into the towns, and endeavour to eclipse all the *commis voyageurs* whom I encountered on the road.

"Having left Paris in September, I calculated on getting through the whole work of my northern district in about ten weeks, and hoped to arrive in England in time for Christmas-day. The change of government, how-

ever, had given an unusual impetus to international trade, and I found business accumulating on my hands day by day, to such an extent, that I soon gave up all hope of reaching home before the latter end of January. As Christmas approached, and I continued travelling slowly in a north and north-westerly direction, I began to wonder where my Christmas-day would be spent after all. At one time I thought it would be at Lisieux; at another at Caen; and at last I made sure it would be at Bayeux. I was mistaken, however, in all my conjectures, as you will hear presently.

"On the night of the 23rd of December, I slept at a populous little market town called Crépigny, which lies about eighteen miles inland, and about midway between Caen and Bayeux. On the morning of the 24th I rose unusually early, and started soon after daybreak; for I had a long day's journey before me, and hoped to reach Bayeux that night. I could not,

however, take the direct road, being bound first for St. Angely, a small coast-town lying near the mouth of the Aire, just opposite Portsmouth on the map. My only chance, therefore, was to make a long day, and, if possible, leave St. Angely early enough to allow of my pushing on to Bayeux that afternoon. My route from Crépigny to St. Angely lay across a bleak open country thinly planted with orchards, and scattered over here and there with villages, farms, and desolate, half-ruined country-houses. A thick white frost lay like snow upon the landscape. A grey mist brooded over the horizon. A bitter wind swept every now and then across the plain, and shook the bare poplars that bordered the road on either side. Sometimes I passed a cart loaded with firewood, or a stout country wench in a warm cloak and sabôts; but I had all the road to myself, for the most part; and a very dreary road it was. It grew drearier, too, with every mile. Habi-

tations became fewer and farther between. Every blast of wind brought with it a cloud of fine white dust; and now and then, as I reached the summit of a little eminence, or turned the shoulder of a sand slope, I caught distant glimpses of the sea.

"It was about eleven o'clock in the morning when I neared the end of my first stage, and came in sight of St. Angely-sur-Aire; a melancholy riverside town, consisting of a singular irregular street about a mile in length, bordered by houses on one side and quays on the other.

"Having dashed along the quays, and pulled up, with my customary flourish, at the door of the principal inn, I alighted, ordered lunch, sent my horse to the stable, and went out into the town. I soon found, however, that there was no business to be done there. The place was too remote and too primitive; being peopled chiefly by small ship-owners,

boat-builders, colliers, fishermen, and sailors. The inhabitants, besides, were not so friendly as in the more frequented towns. I could not help feeling that I was looked upon with disfavour as I walked along the streets. The children hooted after me. The shopkeepers were scarcely civil. It was evident that an Englishman was both an unusual and unwelcome visitor in the lonely little town of St. Angely-sur-Aire.

"Going back, in no pleasant frame of mind, to the *Cheval Blanc*, I found my lunch prepared in a corner of the public-room, beside a window overlooking the river. A large wood fire blazed upon the hearth; a coloured print of Napoleon at Marengo hung over the chimney-piece; and at a long oak table in the centre of the sanded floor sat some five or six Frenchmen, drinking sour wine, smoking bad cigars, and playing dominoes.

"They looked up sullenly as I came in,

and muttered among themselves. I could not distinguish what the words were; but I felt sure they related in some uncomplimentary manner to myself; and this, as you may well believe, did not help to make me more amiable. In short, being but a hot-tempered, conceited young fellow at the best of times, and being, moreover, on this occasion particularly annoyed by the reception I had met with in the town, I gave myself more airs than ever, found fault with the cutlets, abused the wine, worried the waiter, and made myself, I have no doubt, eminently disagreeable.

"'Call this Bordeaux, indeed!' said I, superciliously. 'In England we would not buy it for vinegar. Have you nothing better?'

"'Nothing, monsieur,' replied the waiter humbly. 'We keep only two qualities, and monsieur ordered the best.'

"'In England!' ejaculated one of the domino players—a shabby fellow in a faded

uniform, who looked like a custom-house officer—'Bah! What do they know about wine in England? They grow no grapes. They are thankful over there for the washings of our vats.'

"Stupid as the insult was, the blood rushed to my face, and tingled in my fingers. I longed to contradict the man; but it was of no use getting into a broil, if a little prudence would avert it. So I held my tongue, and affected not to hear. His companions laughed, and presently he spoke again.

"'What can you expect,' pursued he, 'in a country where the land is all swamp, and the air all fog, and every man keeps a shop? Monsieur there, you see, doesn't know wine from vinegar. How should he? The English drink nothing but beer and tea!'

"I could bear it no longer.

"'Stop there, friend,' said I, boiling over with rage, but endeavouring to speak calmly. 'It's a pity you should allow yourself to ex-

press opinions upon a subject of which you know nothing.'

"'Did monsieur speak?'

"'I did speak. I said you expressed opinions on a subject of which you know nothing.'

"'It appears to me, monsieur, that I have a right to express what opinions I please.'

"'Not when they are offensive to others.'

"'Pardon, monsieur—how could I tell that my opinions would offend? If I said that England was all swamp and fog, what then? Monsieur did not make the climate of his native country. If I said . . . '

"'You know nothing about either our customs or our climate,' I interrupted, angrily.

"'And if I said that the English were a nation of shopkeepers,' pursued he, 'have I not the authority of the great Napoleon for

that statement? Is not monsieur himself a commercial traveller?'

"The cool impertinence of the fellow, and the undisguised amusement of his friends, enraged me beyond all the bounds of prudence.

"'Shopkeepers or not,' I retorted, 'we have beaten the French too often to care for a nickname! Were they shopkeepers who routed you at Trafalgar? Were they shopkeepers before whom your Old Guard turned and fled at Waterloo? Were they——'

"My words were drowned in a torrent of imprecations. Furious and gesticulating, every Frenchman was instantly on his feet; whilst I, expecting nothing less than an immediate attack, snatched up a chair, and prepared for a desperate defence. At this moment, however, the landlord, alarmed by the noise, rushed in and placed himself between us.

[illegible]

[illegible] say, gentlemen!'

[illegible] quarrelling here.

[illegible] I am ashamed of

[illegible] life! shall we be insult-

[illegible] Englishman?' stormed

[illegible] the honour of France to be

[illegible] stion?' shouted another.

[illegible] memory of our *grande armée* to

[illegible]?' added a third.

Nonsense—nonsense!' expostulated the

[illegible] I'll bet a *louis d'or* that monsieur

[illegible] nothing of the kind. He is an English-

[illegible] are Frenchmen. You don't under-

[illegible] each other—*voilà tout!* Remember

[illegible] of hospitality, gentlemen, and re-

[illegible] that monsieur is a stranger. I'll be

[illegible] that monsieur was not the first to

[illegible]

'*Parbleu!* I was the first to begin—I

[illegible] it,' said the customs officer, good-

temperedly. 'I put monsieur out by abusing his country.'

"'And I confess that I lost my temper too easily,' replied I; 'and said much that I should be ashamed to repeat.'

"'Suppose, messieurs, you make your peace over another bottle of wine,' suggested the landlord, rubbing his hands.

"'With all my heart,' said I, 'if these gentlemen will allow me to call for one!'

"The Frenchmen laughed, stroked their moustachios, shook hands, and forgot their anger as readily as if nothing had happened—all except one, a bronzed, grey-bearded man in a blue blouse and gaiters, who pulled his cap angrily over his eyes, muttered something about *maudit Anglais*, and strode out of the room.

"'*Peste!* that old François is as savage as a bear,' said one of my late opponents.

"'He is an old soldier,' observed another,

apologetically. 'He served under Napoleon, and he hates the English.'

"'I am really sorry if I have hurt the feelings of a brave man,' said I. 'Can we not induce him to come back and chink glasses with us?"

"'No—no; let him alone. He is a savage-tempered fellow, and best left to himself. Your health, monsieur, and a pleasant journey!'

"And with this, the good-natured *garçons* drew round the fire, pulled out their cigars, smacked their lips over their wine, and chatted away as pleasantly as if we had made each other's acquaintance under the most agreeable auspices in the world. When the first bottle was emptied, I called for another, and by the time we had done justice to the second, it was nearly three o'clock in the afternoon, and fully time for me to begin my journey.

"'If monsieur is going to Crépigny,' said

a young farmer, whom his companions called Adolphe, 'I will gladly take a seat in his chaise as far as the cross-roads.'

"'Unfortunately, I came from Crépigny this morning, and am now bound for Bayeux,' I replied.

"'For Bayeux? *Peste!* then monsieur has a good long road before him.'

"'How far do you call it? I did not think it was more than three leagues.'

"'Three leagues?—nearer five."

"Five French leagues, and only another hour of daylight before me! That was more than I had bargained for.

"'Monsieur had better let his horse go back to the stable, and stay with us to-night at the *Cheval Blanc*,' suggested the landlord, obsequiously.

I shook my head.

"'No, no,' I said. 'That will never do. I want to spend my Christmas-day at Bayeux to-morrow. Five leagues, you say?'

"'Full five by the road,' answered the custom-house officer. 'But there is a shorter way, if monsieur can only find it.'

"'You would not send monsieur by the river?' interposed the landlord.

"'Why not? It will save him a good league.'

"'*Mon Dieu*, it is not safe for a stranger —especially after dusk!'

"'Safe, Maître Pierre! Why it's as safe as the high road when the tide is out,' replied the other, contemptuously. 'Listen, monsieur. About five kilometres from St. Angely, the Aire empties itself into the sea. It is but a narrow river, as you see it here—narrow and deep; but out there it gets wide and shallow; wider than the Seine at Paris. *Eh, bien*, monsieur, about four kilometres from hence, and about one before you reach the mouth of the Aire, you come to a place called *L'Eau Perdu*. It is just an arm of the river —a reach in fact, which at high water feeds

a small stream, over which you would have to cross by the bridge at Creuilly if you went round by the high road; but which, if you take the way by the coast, you can drive across as easily as possible when it is low tide. There is no danger in the world, monsieur may take my word for it; and it saves a *détour* of at least a league.'

"'Monsieur had much better not attempt it,' said mine host of the *Cheval Blanc*.

"'Nay, I am not afraid of attempting it, if I can but find my way,' replied I. "My horse is no longer fresh, and a league is a league.'

"'Monsieur cannot fail to go rightly,' said the custom-house officer. 'You drive straight forward, and take the first road to the left past the church. Follow that road till you come to a lane leading to a little inn called the *Bon Christophe*, and then ask any one to show you the best place to drive over. The house stands just on the brink of *L'Eau*

Perdu, and in sight of the mouth of the Aire. If it is dusk, there is always a light burning at the revenue station on the opposite side.'

"'A thousand thanks,' said I, jumping into my chaise, and gathering up the reins. 'You are quite sure the tide will be out?"

"'The tide is out now,' replied the custom-house officer, taking out his watch, 'and will not turn till ten minutes past four o'clock. If it had turned already, monsieur would still be in good time, for the reach does not fill till nearly high tide. Monsieur will have to drive over a quarter of a mile of muddy bottom. He will get his wheels dirty—*voilà tout!*'

"'I'm not afraid of that misfortune,' said I laughing. 'Adieu, gentlemen. May we soon meet again to pledge our goodwill in another bottle of Maître Pierre's Bordeaux!'

"With this and a profusion of bows,

adieux, and good wishes, we parted; I driving off at a rapid pace that brought the inhabitants of St. Angely-sur-Aire to their windows as I rattled past, and my friends of the *Cheval Blanc* crowding round the threshold of that decent little hostelry, to do honour to my departure.

"I found my way easily enough past the church, and down the road to the left, along which I had been directed. It was not by any means a pleasant drive. The afternoon was dull and raw; the road was rough; the grey sea-mist thickened in the distance; and the wind was piercingly cold. The distance, too, proved greater than I had expected, and I was obliged, by the bad condition of the road, to drive very slowly. In the meantime the mist continued to thicken and the light to fade, so that by the time I reached the lane it was almost dusk. Such a lane as it was, too!—rough as a ploughed field and wet as a pond, with stones over which the horse stumbled,

and ruts into which the wheels sank at every yard. Bad as the road had been, it was nothing to this. However, it was too late to turn back, so I dismounted, led my horse, and endeavoured to make the best of my position. The lane terminated presently in a broad space of waste ground, in the midst of which I saw the dark outline of a house and the glimmer of a lighted casement. Concluding that this must be the *auberge* of the *Bon Christophe*, I at once turned my horse's head in that direction, and led him, as well as I could, over the uneven ground that lay between. As I drew near the house I heard voices; but it was not till I came within a yard or two of the gate on which they were leaning that I could distinguish the forms of the two men who were speaking.

"'Holà!' said I, 'is this the auberge of the *Bon Christophe*?'

"'That it is, monsieur, and I am the landlord, at monsieur's service,' replied the shorter

of the two, stepping forward and holding the gate open. 'Monsieur will please to enter? We have excellent beds—a good stable—every accommodation for travellers!'

"'Thanks; but I only want to be directed to the best place for driving over the reach here. The tide is out, I believe?"

"'Yes, monsieur, the tide is out—that is to say, it is just about to turn,' replied the landlord in a tone of disappointment.

"'And I can cross with safety?'

"The landlord hesitated.

"'Because, if not,' I added, suspecting that he would keep me if he could, 'I shall drive back at once to St. Angely-sur-Aire, and sleep at the *Cheval Blanc*'

"'The reach is quite passable,' said the taller man, abruptly.

"'Oh, yes—it is passable,' admitted the landlord. 'Monsieur has but to drive straight for the light at the revenue-station. He cannot go wrong.'

"'Will you be so obliging, then, as to send some one just to put me in the right way?'

"'Certainly, monsieur; I will call . . .'

"'No need to call any one,' interposed the other. 'I am going by the beach. Follow me. Good night, friend Collet.'

"'Good night, François,' replied the landlord, somewhat sulkily. 'Be sure you explain to monsieur the difference between the two lights.'

"'Bah! do you take me for a fool?'

"Saying which, my guide pushed hastily forward, and I followed. It was too dark to see his features distinctly; but something in his height, in his gait, in the tone of his voice, struck me as not wholly unfamiliar. Then his name—the landlord called him François. Was not François the name of the old soldier whom I saw three hours since in the public room of the *Cheval Blanc?* It was quite possible that he might be the same man. Nay,

the more I thought of it, the more I felt sure of his identity. And what if he were the same? Was it worth while to allude to the fracas of the afternoon? Surely not. He did not seem to have recognized me, and it might only lead to further disagreement. I deemed it better, on the whole, to say nothing. These thoughts flashed through my mind in less time than it takes to relate them. Just as I came to my decision, I found we were descending a sandy slope, beyond which lay what seemed to be a wide tract of mud and shingle. Far away across this waste, showing dimly through the mist, and distant, apparently, about half a mile from each other, gleamed two lights, one red and one white. My guide halted suddenly.

"'*Voilà*,' said he. 'There are the two beacons—one on board the guard-ship at the mouth of the Aire; the other at the revenue-station across the reach. Do you see both?'

"'Yes, I see both plainly.'

" 'Then drive straight for the red one.'

" 'Thanks. Is the bottom tolerably level? Need I lead the horse?'

" 'No; it is all smooth. Nothing but mud and sand.'

" 'Thanks again, *mon ami*. Good night.'

"He made no answer, but turned and strode away, heavily and rapidly, into the darkness.

" I jumped into the chaise, wrapped a rug about my knees, lit a cigar, fixed my eyes steadily on the red light, and drove forward. In another moment, the wheels went off the shingly slope, and we were going smoothly and noiselessly along the bed of the reach. It was not by any means bad driving. The bottom, though somewhat yielding on the surface, was firm enough an inch below it; and the little pools through which we splashed now and then, or the shells, which grated occasionally under the wheels, offered no obstacle to our progress.

"The air, too, was fresh and salt, with a pleasant perfume of the sea; and there was something exciting, after all, in driving out towards that red light, and remembering that in a few hours more it would be deep water in the channel between.

"All at once my horse neighed, and stood still. I spoke to him, stroked him gently with the whip, and succeeded in urging him forward some few yards farther, when he stopped again, more suddenly than before. It happened that we were at that moment in the midst of a pool deeper and more extensive than any through which I had yet driven; but for this I accounted by calculating that I had already traversed close upon half the distance, and that towards the mid-channel the deposit of water would naturally be somewhat greater. It was this, probably, that alarmed the horse. Whatever it was, however, I could not sit there for his pleasure; and so, finding persuasion useless, I administered three

or four sharp cuts of the whip, which had the effect of making him start on again, though with evident reluctance.

"It was strange; but, driving forward thus and steering ever for the red light ahead, I observed that the isolated pools had within the last few minutes become merged into one shallow sheet of water, extending under the wheels in every direction. In spite of myself, I grew nervous. Knowing that my best course must be to get out of the mid-channel as quickly as possible, I whipped the horse forward all the faster. Still the bottom seemed to decline lower and lower, and the water to rise higher at every yard. I looked eagerly round. The spot whence I had started was no longer distinguishable; but the red light, now larger and nearer than ever, glowed encouragingly through the mist. It was too late to turn back. Cost what it might, I *must* go forward!

"At this moment my horse flung him-

self back upon his haunches, planted his fore-legs firmly in the sand, and refused to stir a step farther. Was this fear, or instinct? I dared not ask myself the question. I dared not avow the terrible suspicion that had been gaining upon me during the last few minutes. I gathered up the reins, rose in my seat, and lashed him as I had never lashed him yet since the day I bought him. He resisted, snorted, then dashed on desperately, though the pool by this time rose within an inch of his knees.

"And now, quite suddenly, I became aware that there was a ripple on the surface of the water. From that moment I gave myself up for lost. From that moment I knew that the tide was upon me!

"I am amazed to this hour when I remember how calmly I took it. Every nerve, every thought, every feeling, seemed bound up in the one aim of self-preservation. My only hope lay in the red light; now, apparently,

some four hundred yards distant. And still the water rose higher, and the ripple grew stronger, till I felt the chaise undulate, and knew that my poor brute could not keep his legs two minutes longer. My course was taken upon the instant. I knew that both he and I must now swim for our lives; so I took out my pocket-knife, deliberately pulled off my boots, coat, and waistcoat, jumped into the water, cut the horse free, and struck out in the direction of the beacon.

"I was but a poor swimmer at that time, and the current was setting dead against me. Still I kept my head to the red light, made what progress I could, and, though I felt the tide growing stronger every moment, made my mind up to fight it out doggedly to the last. A long time seemed to go by thus; I could not tell how long, for my thoughts, somehow, became confused. Then the water roared about my ears, and the red light came and went before my eyes, and I felt, with a

despair beyond all words, that my strength was going! Then came a terrible moment when the beacon disappeared, as if swallowed up suddenly in the darkness—then something huge, black, shapeless, loomed up all at once before me, like a rock, and, fainting as I was, I knew it was a ship, and felt that in another moment I should be sucked under her bows! I shall never forget the horror of the next three or four seconds. I shall never forget how I tried to shout for help—how my hands glided over the wet hull—how, summoning all my strength for a last effort, I uttered one despairing shriek, felt the waves close over my head, and knew that I was going to the bottom!

"When I recovered consciousness, I found myself lying before a stove in a warm cabin, with a bottle of brandy to my lips, and a crowd of kind faces round me. I soon learnt that I was on board the guard-ship at the mouth of the Aire, a good two miles from land

on any side. The sailor on watch had heard my drowning cry, jumped overboard as easily as a Newfoundland dog, and saved me as I rose the second time. I was very ill and exhausted, as you may suppose, and thankful to lie quietly in a hammock all that night, and a greater part of the Christmas-day that followed; and I can tell you that I shared those poor sailors' onion soup and salt beef with more thankfulness than I ever felt at the finest Christmas dinner to which it was my lot to be invited."

"And what about the soldier, sir?" asked the schoolmaster, after the first excitement had subsided, and the stranger had relapsed into silence.

"Ay—what about that black villain François?" echoed the parish clerk.

"I don't know," replied the stranger, abruptly. "I never cared to ask. Either he knew that he was sending me to my death, or he mistook the lights. God forbid that

I should accuse an innocent man of wilful murder. Error or no error, however, he cost me a good chaise and a valuable horse, neither of which did I ever see or hear of again. And now, gentlemen, I'll thank you for another glass of punch."

CHAPTER IV.

A RAILWAY PANIC.

If this were played upon a stage, now, I could condemn it as an improbable fiction.—*Twelfth Night.*

"DO you think I look like a madman?"

I was falling into a train of pleasant thought when these words, uttered in a clear, steady voice by my opposite neighbour, fell upon my ear. I started and looked him in the face. He was a small, sallow, intelligent-looking man, muffled from head to foot in a superb Spanish cloak lined with sables. His tone of voice was perfectly composed and matter-of-fact.

"Indeed, sir," I replied, with some surprise, "no such idea occurred to me."

"But I *am* mad, though!" he retorted, in the same quiet, confidential way.

I was in no humour for levity just then, and, as this was evidently an attempt at practical joking, I made a brief reply to that effect, and looked out of the window. It was an express train, going at the rate of fifty miles an hour; every moment bore me farther from one who was inexpressibly dear to me; and I felt that I never wished for silence and solitude more than at that moment. The worst of it was that, if this man had made up his mind to talk, I could not help hearing him; and there was no one else for him to address, since we were alone together in the carriage.

"Yes," he continued, "I really am mad. I have just escaped; just escaped—not an hour ago. Shall I tell you how I did it?"

I continued to look out at the landscape

flying past, and feigned not to hear him.

"I was not always mad. Oh, dear, no! I do not exactly remember now what it was that drove me to it, but I think it was something connected with Lord Palmerston and the ace of clubs. No—yes—oh, yes; the ace of clubs had certainly something to do with it. However, that is of no consequence now. I had a fine house, and gardens, and horses, and servants, and a wife—aha! such a pretty, gentle, loving little wife! And I loved her, too—nobody knows how I loved her—only I wanted to murder her. I loved her so that I wanted to murder her! Wasn't that a rare joke, eh?"

I began by this time to feel seriously uncomfortable. It was getting slowly dusk, and my companion's face, composed as it was, wore an odd expression that I did not quite like.

"Pray, sir," I said, with affected carelessness, "let us change the subject. If you

insist on conversing with me, we may as well choose a more agreeable theme."

"Agreeable! Could anything be more agreeable? Well, I will continue. It was a long time before they found it out; I hid it so well. But I knew it well enough; for I used to see faces everywhere, in the furniture—up in the trees—in the bushes; and I knew they could not really be there, and that I was mad at last. For I had always expected it. Ay, ever since I was a boy at school! Somehow they did find it out, though, in spite of all my caution—and I was so cautious—so cautious! They found it out; and, one day, two men came and seized me in my garden—my own garden! and took me to the mad-house! Oh! it was a dreary place that mad-house! They shut me up by myself in a bare, cold room, with never a fire to warm me, though it was bitter winter. The windows were barred across with iron, through which the daylight shone as if through the ribs of a skeleton; and

every night—would you believe it?—every night there came a fearful shape and sat there, mocking and mowing at me in the moonbeams. That was a hell, indeed! One night, when I could bear it no longer, I rushed upon the shape and fought and struggled with it, and dashed it up against the hard walls—and then the keepers came and tore me from it, and bound me down with cords upon my bed. I heard them say to one another that I had tried to destroy myself; but I knew better. It was the shape I struggled with—it was the shape I tried to kill! Only they could not see it. Yet there it still sat, mocking, mocking, mocking, all the long night through; and they watching in my room, and yet so blind that they could not perceive it! I do not know how long this fury of mine lasted; but I think it must have been a weary time. At length, I woke one night from a troubled sleep, and lo! the shape was gone! Ah, then I wept for

joy that I was free from it; and I was proud, very proud, for it was gone, and I had conquered it at last! Well, time went on, and I resolved I would escape. How do you suppose I went to work? Why, I pretended to be cured of my madness. Every day the doctor came to see me. But not me alone; I could hear him going to every room all along the corridor; so I knew when he was coming, long before he got to my door. I must deceive him, I knew, as well as everybody else. Oh, it was a hard task; but I did it! The worst of my madness was that I could not help thinking of the oddest things; and when I talked, my tongue would utter them. However, I schooled myself to talk to him. I practised speaking in a calm, low voice—I studied what I should say—I accustomed myself to rise and bow, as if he were entering the room. I did not speak much, but what I said was reasonable—I knew it was reasonable. I

used to say that I felt better; that I was tired of the confinement; that I hoped shortly to be permitted to return home; and sometimes (that *was* a clever thought!) I asked anxiously after my wife. One day she came to see me. You cannot think what an effort her visit cost me. She looked so pale, and timid, and pretty that day—and I forced myself to sit down by her; to say to her all the things I had learnt to say to the doctor; to take her hand in mine; and oh, I longed to kill her so the whole time! But I did not. Ah, no! I even kissed her cheek at parting, though I could have yelled aloud for rage as I bent over her. I don't know whether they still suspected me; but I was not released, for all my pains. So I determined to be ill. I knew the doctor would find me out if I only pretended; therefore, I starved myself. Ha! ha! wasn't that fine? This is how I did it. Every day, instead of eating the food they brought

me, I put half of it under a loose board in the floor, and half I left, saying that I felt ill and could eat no more. Each day I left more and more, so that it should seem as if my appetite grew constantly worse. And then I got ill—only I did eat just a morsel now and then to keep me from dying. I suffered fearfully, but still I played my part out, and met the doctor's eye with one as quiet as his own. At last he said that I must be removed to another part of the house, and that I required air, or I should never recover. And then did I not laugh, even though I was so ill, to think how I had outwitted him! My new room was pleasant, and looked over a garden. At the end of the garden was a railway. By this railway, I made up my mind to escape. Aha! what joy to be flying along behind that engine—flying away, away, and never stopping! I knew well that I must have money to do this. Money! Where, and how could I get money? You will

see presently! I did not mean to die, you know, so I ate more now, and got better. It is not every one, let me tell you, that is brave enough to endure starvation as I did. Madmen are no cowards! Well, they used to let me walk in the garden after awhile, but with the keeper always beside me. By-and-by, the doctor began to speak of my release as of a thing that might be in time—and then—then, although the end for which I had been working was almost within my grasp, I felt an irresistible impulse compelling me to escape, and not to wait for their tame deliverance. Day and night, I waited and watched to do it.

"The opportunity came soon. One morning when I was walking with the keeper in the garden, who should come out but the doctor, and what should he do—the senseless fool!—but order the keeper to go in, saying that he would walk with me this time!

"Oh, how my heart leaped and danced

within me when he said it! But I kept very still—very still and calm—listening to the man's footsteps on the gravel walk till he was quite gone. I have told you that the railway crossed the bottom of the garden. Well, towards this spot I went (carelessly, as if by accident, you know), and he with me.

"'This beautiful day will do us all good, Mr. B——,' he said to me, in his smooth, deceitful voice.

"He was walking with his hands in his pockets, chinking the gold coins as he went—that gold that I so needed!

"'I hope that you may soon enjoy the summer on your own estates,' he continued.

"He looked so sleek and self-confident and smiling as he spoke then, that I hated him more than ever.

"I did not dare to trust my voice in answer, or suffer my eyes to dwell on him. Could he but have seen *them* for an instant,

he would have read my purpose. Just then we reached the extremity of the garden, and stood looking down from the high bank upon the level tram-lines below. There was nothing but a low hedge between us and the road. In an instant I turned upon him.

"'Die!' I shrieked. 'Die! I *am* mad—I *am* mad—and I have sworn to do it!'

"I had the strength of ten in my arms. I closed with him, and dashed his skull against the tree-trunk by which we were standing. Oh, it was a glorious vengeance! I beat the smooth smile out of his face till his own children would not have known him, and then I stamped and danced upon him, and laughed aloud! Suddenly I heard the distant whistle of the train at the village station. There was not a moment to be lost! I tore the watch from his pocket, and I took the purse with the gold! and then,

ha ! ha ! ha ! I flung the body over upon the lines, and the train came swiftly on and on, and crushed him as he lay ! Was not that a revenge, and would any but a madman have thought of it ? Tell me that ! Tell me that !"

I was so frozen with horror that I sat as if petrified, and could not utter a word.

"Now you want to know how I came here," continued the maniac more quietly, after a momentary pause. "Well, he had this cloak on before the struggle. I wrapped it round me, and went straight through the gardens, and out of the gate, past his very lodge-keeper ; and, thanks to the high collar, none of them knew me—for we were much of a height, the doctor and I. Once out of sight of the house —the dreary, cruel house !—I seemed as if I had wings upon my feet, I fled away so fast. The people in the streets of the town stared at me; but what did that matter? I did not care for their staring. I mingled with the crowd at the station and paid my fare like the rest, with—ha !

ha!—with the doctor's money! But there was blood on the gold. I tried to rub it off, but I could not. It came again as fast as I removed it, and I thought they would see it when I put the money down. They did not, though; and here I am free—free! Now, answer me, do you believe that I'm a madman?"

He put his face quite close to mine as he said this, and his voice passed from its former level tone to a quick, harsh, exulting calibre that thrilled me with dismay. It was now almost dark, too, and his eyes shone with a cold, unnatural lustre like the phosphorescent light which is thrown off from fish in a state of putrefaction. It was clear that I must make some reply. Even while I hesitated, he repeated the question, and this time more impatiently.

"Well, yes," I said at last, with quivering lips; "I—I think you must be mad."

"I'll prove it to you," he whispered, bend-

ing still closer to me. "How do you think I'll prove it now?"

I shook my head.

"I cannot tell," I said, faintly.

"By murdering you, as I murdered him! What! did you think I would let you live, after having told you all about it? Live to betray me, and take me back to the . . . No, no! madmen are brave—madmen are cunning—madmen are strong!"

I saw that force could avail me nothing here. In great emergencies I always retain my presence of mind. This time it did not fail me, and I was cool in an instant.

"Stop," I said calmly, fixing my eyes full upon him. "You have not yet told me all. If you are determined to have my life, it is only fair that you should finish your story first."

"That's true," said the madman, with some appearance of curiosity. "What have I left out?"

"You have not explained to me about Lord Palmerston and the ace of clubs."

"I didn't think you'd care to hear that," said he, doubtfully.

"I'd rather hear that than all the rest."

The lamp now cast a sickly glare through the carriage; and it was so dark that nothing of the country was visible beyond the windows. I knew we must be within a short distance of the London terminus. If I could only divert his attention for a little while longer, I was saved! I determined to keep him in conversation if possible.

"Lord Palmerston began it, you must know," he continued, "and the ace of clubs finished it."

"Did you know Lord Palmerston?" I asked.

He looked at me vacantly, as if he did not comprehend my question. I repeated it.

"Know him? I bred and trained him!"

"Oh! indeed?" I said. "Pray proceed."

"I bred and trained him on my own estates. I was as fond of him as I could have been of a child—ay, and fonder too; for if I had had a child, I must have wrung its neck —I feel I must!"

Here he fixed his eyes on me again, and his fingers worked nervously together, as if longing to be at my throat.

"But about Lord Palmerston?" said I.

His face resumed the old expression, and a gloomy shade seemed to pass over it.

"Ah!" said he, moodily, "that was a dreadful disappointment, wasn't it?"

"You have not told me yet," I said. "Did his lordship treat you ill?"

"He lost! he lost! I had backed him with half my fortune, and he lost! But, hark you!" and he clutched me by the arm as he said it, "he was drugged—I know he was drugged the night before!"

"Then Lord Palmerston was a horse!" I exclaimed.

"Of course he was. I told you so at first. You don't pay attention—you're not interested."

"Indeed, I am—deeply," I replied, eagerly. "Pray go on."

We *must* be in now before five minutes were past—this I was assured of. Five minutes!—long enough to die!

"That is all," replied he, with a suspicious stare. "He lost, and I lost. That's the end of it."

"But what has this to do with the ace of clubs?"

"The ace of clubs!" said he, fiercely. "What's that to you?"

"You promised to tell me, you know; and I should like to hear it," I replied, in a conciliating tone. "You have not told me half yet. Do tell me about the ace of clubs."

"I was desperate, you see," said the maniac. "I was desperate after Palmerston knocked up. I had always avoided play till then, but somehow I fell into it when I saw the men at the club playing night after night, winning and losing—winning and losing! I often saw as much gold change hands on a single card as would have covered all my losses on the turf; and then I could not resist it."

"So you played too?"

"So I played too. For a whole week I won incessantly. Aha! the red gold and the rustling notes that I took home every night for that week! I won more, three times more, than I had lost by the race! And then came the turn of the luck."

"You lost?"

"All that I had gained, in one night! But I was not satisfied: I went on again the next day, and lost, and lost, and lost, till everything I had on earth was gone. Nay, all

I had on earth was not enough to pay it! But I know how it was. That old man I played with was the Fiend. I knew he was the Fiend. I saw it in his eyes."

He paused.

The whistle of the guard rang shrilly through the air, and the pace of the train slackened. He listened—he knew that we were coming in—he turned suddenly towards me.

"But what about the ace of clubs?" I urged, hurriedly. "Did the old man turn it up?"

"Will you betray me if I tell you?"

"Never," I said, earnestly.

"Listen, then. I hid it in my sleeve; for I was desperate. I staked thousands on the chance of cutting it. They all stood round, betting how it would turn up; the old man—curse him!—smiled, and let me do it. But he had seen me—he had seen me! And when I cut the ace of clubs, he stood up and called me 'Thief!'"

A bright flash of light streamed in at the windows—the train stopped. Thank God! we were arrived! The madman shrunk back at the sight of the lamps, and the crowd of faces beyond. I leaned over the door, and with fingers that refused to do their work, felt eagerly for the handle.

"What is the matter? What is this?" he said, timidly.

"Help!" I shrieked, springing out upon the platform among the tide of passengers. "Help! this man is mad!"

There were two men standing by the barrier anxiously scrutinizing each face as it passed by. They both turned as I spoke, and one came to me.

"Where is he, sir?" said he, respectfully. "We're waiting for him. It's been telegraphed along the line that he's murdered some one down at H——, and he's awful dangerous."

He had ventured out by this time, and was

standing irresolutely beside the carriage door, not knowing where to turn.

As for me, I could only point to him, for the power of speech was gone; and just as they had captured him, I fell senseless to the ground.

CHAPTER V.

THE GREY DOMINO.

I have seen the day that I have worn a visor.
Romeo and Juliet.

MAURICE DUHAMEL was my best friend and constant companion in those days of which I am about to tell you. He lives now at Marseilles, and I in London; but distance makes no difference to a friendship like ours. We write to each other once in every month; and were we to meet again face to face and hand to hand to-morrow, it would be with us as though we had parted but yesterday.

I made his friendship in Paris. Napoleon was then First Consul, and the English

thronged over the Channel by hundreds to his civic court—I amongst the rest. I was young—tolerably rich—fond of fun, variety, and adventure. I aspired moreover to the honours of authorship. That is to say, I had written a tragedy which was hissed, and a novel that fell still-born from the press. I had not been in Paris many days before I waited on Maurice Duhamel with a letter of introduction. He gave me a cordial welcome. Our liking was mutual, and ripened speedily to friendship. He took me everywhere; initiated me into all those phases of Paris life known only to the native resident; and, in fact, gave me an insight into men and manners which, as a stranger, I could not otherwise have acquired.

It was, I think, about the middle of the month of October when I arrived in Paris. By the time that the Carnival season approached, I was familiar with all parts of the capital, and intimate with Duhamel. I had

long been anticipating the advent of that giddy festival; and my friend promised to take me to many places of entertainment, of which the uninstructed traveller finds no mention in the pages of Galignani.

We bought our tickets for the first grand Bal Masqué at the Opera full three weeks beforehand; and I devoted myself, with boyish vanity, to the invention of a gorgeous and fantastic domino, which I flattered myself should attract universal attention wherever I made my appearance. Even the *costumier* under whose direction it was to be made up, confessed that my design was altogether original.

I had for some time observed that Maurice was less cheerful than when I first knew him. He no longer shared my joyous anticipations of fun and frolic to come. He grew daily more pale and dejected, and sighed when I spoke of the Bal de l'Opera. At length there came an evening when his melancholy was so

obvious that I felt I might venture to observe it. It was the evening of the day preceding the Carnival, and we were taking coffee in my apartments.

"Maurice," I said, "you are not happy. You have some secret trouble."

He shook his head.

"Pshaw," he said, "it is nothing—the effect of study—of late hours—of *ennui!*"

But I was not thus to be put off.

"I know there is something more than this," I said, earnestly. "Surely, Maurice, I have some claim to your confidence?"

"*Eh bien!*" he said, as a faint flush passed over his face. "I am in—in love, then. In love—unhappy—plunged in doubt—worried by suspense and—and now you know all!"

I did not know all, nor half; but I could elicit nothing farther from him; and shortly afterwards he hurried away, promising to call for me the next evening at eight o'clock, that we might go together to the Opera.

The next day came at last, and the Carnival began. My elegant domino, the cherished offspring of my invention, was to have been sent home long since, and had not yet arrived. I had scarcely any appetite for breakfast, and could not keep my attention fixed for five minutes together on the columns of the *Journal des Debats*. My windows looked out upon the Boulevard des Capucines. There was an unusual gaiety and bustle pervading that gayest of thoroughfares, but as yet I had seen no masks, and this somewhat consoled me for the delay of my domino. One o'clock came; a few masks were now thinly scattered among the foot passengers, and several had made their appearance in the open carriages. Three o'clock—still no domino! I wrote an urgent letter, and sent it by one of the public messengers. M. Giroux returned a polite reply, stating that the extreme pressure of business had unavoidably retarded the completion of Mr. Hamilton's costume, but Mr. Hamilton

might rely upon its arrival in time for the Bal Masqué in the evening.

Here was a provoking circumstance! I had ordered an open carriage for that afternoon, in which to display my domino along the Boulevards, and now—to be compelled to wait till evening . . . . it was too bad! I paced up and down the apartment in a fury of disappointment.

The carriage came—I sent it away again; and at five o'clock strolled into a neighbouring restaurant to while away the hours that yet intervened. At seven I returned. The domino had not yet arrived.

Eight o'clock came and passed away, and neither my friend nor my domino made their appearance. Nine—half-past—a quarter to ten.

I was in despair. Could Maurice be ill? —must I go alone to the Ball, and without my domino? I was lying on the sofa, counting the weary minutes, when a heavy

step came slowly up the stairs; the door opened; and a man with a small box put his head into the room.

"Monsieur Hamiltom, from M. Giroux."

I snatched it from his hands with undisguised delight, and precipitated myself into my dressing-room. With hasty fingers I strove to undo the cord, but I only drew it into a hard knot. I looked for my penknife, and could not find it. In short, several minutes had elapsed before I succeeded in opening the box and in drawing forth—oh heavens! not my beautiful, my unique, my elegant domino, but a horrible, ill-favoured garment, made of coarse grey serge, and trimmed with black ribbon.

I flew to the door, and down the stairs; but the man was already out of sight. What I said or did I cannot tell, but I remember finding myself on the point of tearing the domino to pieces, and being suddenly checked by the reflection that if I did so I should have

nothing else to take its place! A bill lay folded at the bottom of the box. It ran thus:

"M. l'Avocat Du Bois, à H. Giroux.
"1 Costume de Bal . . . . 25 francs."

"M. l'Avocat Du Bois!" I said aloud. "Certainly I have heard the name! Yes—I remember:—he lives in the Rue de Richelieu; has a large practice, and the reputation of a miser!. Well, he might give a better price for his domino! The deuce! perhaps he has mine, and will be flourishing to-night in borrowed plumes at some of the soirées . . . . Ah, if I only meet him at the Opera!"

The theatre was crowded; and the whole scene was one blaze of lights and revelry.

Here were Albanians, Cossacks, Pierrots, Spanish noblemen, Italian flower-girls, Greeks, Sultanas, Crusaders, Postilions, Demons, Turks, and Debardeurs without number. Here was all the wealth, the wit, the fashion of

Paris; and here was poor Frederick Hamilton in that detestable grey serge domino!

I saw no one so meanly dressed as myself —I was pursued with jeers and impertinent questions. One complimented me upon my taste in fancy costume; another asked the address of my *costumier;* a third saluted me as "the millionnaire in the serge domino."

In the midst of my distress, I suddenly felt a light touch upon my shoulder, and an arm slipped through mine.

I turned, and saw a lady in the dress of a Carmelite nun, with a mask upon her face, and the hood of her robe drawn closely over her head.

"How late you are!" she said hurriedly, "I have been expecting you for the last two hours."

"*Ma foi, madame,*" I replied, in the best French I could muster. "I feel particularly flattered by your anxiety."

"Alas, monsieur," said the lady impatiently, "why this levity? Surely the moment is too serious for jesting!"

"Madame," I said laughing, "your penetration is surprising. I really have yet to discover the solemnity of a masked ball."

"Pray cease this acting," said the lady, angrily, "and give me the reply for which I have dared to come here alone this evening. The moment is arrived when you must decide —nay, this very night you may be called upon to act. A delay, if only of a few hours —a refusal at the last extremity, when it would be too late to secure another agent— would be sufficient to ensure the success of our cause! Say, monsieur, is it Yes or No?"

I was silent with amazement. The lady continued:—

"If it be money that you want, you shall have it. We will double the sum the Marquis and his advisers pay you. If it be posi-

tion, you know that my husband has sufficient influence to advance you. Speak, monsieur, speak—may we rely upon you to-night, if to-night you should be called upon?"

"I fear, Madame," said I, "that you are addressing me under a wrong impression. I have not the honour of knowing you, and I do not comprehend one word of what you say."

"Are you, then, so unfeeling?" exclaimed my companion. "Can you really treat thus lightly so painful a subject? If you assume this tone, this ignorance, this foreign accent, merely to turn my entreaties into jest, and to steel your heart the more effectually against the appeals of helpless sorrow, it is ill-timed, monsieur—ill-timed and ungenerous. Say at once that you will not assist us—that you are without pity; but, for mercy's sake, cease this cruel mockery!"

"Indeed, madame," I began, "you are mistaken in me . . . ."

"On the contrary, monsieur," she replied,

bitterly, withdrawing her hand from my arm, to which she had been clinging in the eagerness of her appeal—"on the contrary, I but find you what I *had* expected—cold, heartless, unprincipled. For shame, monsieur, thus to suffer the persecution of an innocent girl!"

"Madame, I assure you, if you will but . . . . "

"Enough, monsieur—you refuse. Alas! our trust, now, must be in Heaven alone!"

With these words she turned hastily away, and in an instant I lost sight of her amid the throng. I was greatly surprised by what I had heard.

"Bravo!" I said to myself. "Here is a capital incident on which to weave a story! I shall get 'ideas' out of this Carnival!"

So I pushed my way on through the crowd of masks, in search of new adventures.

All at once a man dressed as a friar darted from behind a column, and grasped me roughly by the arm.

"It is well, monsieur," he said, in a hoarse voice. "I have been looking for you. I have just met Madame la Baronne, and I know all. You refuse—you are inflexible! Very well—but I will have satisfaction, monsieur: satisfaction *à outrance!* You shall hear from me!"

And before I could utter a syllable he had plunged into the crowd and was gone. Singular and unaccountable! It seemed to me that I had recognised the voice and costume of Maurice Duhamel!

Appealed to by an unknown lady, challenged by my friend! The plot thickened. The affair promised to furnish me with a comedy at the very least! I resolved that, if accosted again, I would no longer strive to undeceive those who might address me, but merge my identity in that of the absent unknown, and follow the adventure to an end. One thing was evident, that M. l'Avocat Du Bois was directly or indirectly concerned in

the business, and that for all this perplexity I was indebted to the grey serge domino. Being prepared by this train of reasoning, and the resolution I had taken, I was not so much surprised when, somewhat later in the evening, I found myself an object of especial attention to two men in plain black dominoes. They passed and repassed me once or twice, and I heard one of them say, in a low voice,

"Are you sure that is he?"

"Certain," replied the other; "do you not see the white cross on his shoulder?"

Involuntarily I turned my head, and there, sure enough, was a small white cross, let into the right shoulder of the domino. I had not observed this before.

The two men immediately advanced, and the last speaker, bending his head towards me, and whispering in a quick, cautious voice, said:—

"We are here seeking you, monsieur. The moment is at hand, and there is no time to be

lost. He cannot last many hours longer, and you must accompany us directly. Are you ready?"

This time I was determined not to discover myself; so I bowed silently, and motioned to them to lead the way. Whether they feared that even at the last I might be disposed to give them the slip I know not, but they passed their arms through mine, one at each side, and so pressed through the crowd and on towards the door. A carriage waited at the corner of the street, into which they bade me mount. They then seated themselves opposite; the servant slammed the door; and we drove away almost at a gallop.

Surely I had seen the figure of a friar glide after us through the vestibule of the opera-house, and surely I heard the sound of other wheels behind!

The night was very dark, and all the shops were closed; but I recognised several of the leading thoroughfares—the Rue du Fau-

bourg St. Honoré, the Barrière du Roule, the Avenue of Neuilly! Were we, then, bound for the country? I will not deny that I began to feel somewhat uneasy on finding myself alone with these men, so still, masked, and silent. Despite all my anxiety for adventure, I wished myself back again in the Salle de l'Opéra.

On we went. The Avenue was deserted, and scarcely a chariot passed us on the way.

We stopped at last before a small side door that opened upon the road from the midst of a long high wall. One of my conductors leaped out. The door yielded to his touch, and I followed him into what appeared by that dim light to be a spacious garden surrounding a stately mansion. The carriage drove away; the door was closed behind me; and we passed into the house.

I found myself in a large hall floored with polished marble, and richly decorated. A broad staircase led to the upper apartments,

at the foot of which a servant in livery was waiting.

"What news?" asked one of the dominoes, removing his vizor, and disclosing a pale, careworn face, lit by a pair of eager black eyes.

The servant shook his head.

"M. le Marquis is now speechless," he said, "and M. le Médecin says that he can scarcely live an hour."

"*Mon Dieu!*" cried the domino, striking his hands impatiently together, "how sudden! He seemed as if he would last at least till to-morrow! Quick, quick! Now, monsieur, follow me. Thanks be to the blessed Virgin, the deed is already drawn up!"

He strode rapidly up before me. In doing so, the hood of his domino fell back, and I saw the shaven tonsure of a Roman Catholic priest.

We traversed a suite of reception-rooms by the light of a small lamp which he carried in

his hand. Seen by that dim light, they appeared as if furnished with unwonted magnificence. Our feet sank deep at every step into the soft carpets of Turkey, and gave forth no sound. A heavy atmosphere, as of death, hung around us. The place was all hushed, dark, melancholy.

We reached a doorway curtained with silken hangings. The priest paused, and turned towards me.

"Ten thousand francs if we succeed, monsieur," he whispered between his teeth. "Was not that our agreement?"

I nodded. The second domino removed his mask. He likewise was a priest.

They whispered together, and the first speaker once more addressed me:—

"Do not remove *your* mask, monsieur," he said. "The doctor is still there, and it were better that he should not recognise your features."

"This doctor must be dismissed," muttered

the other, as we entered the sick-chamber.

It was a long and lofty room, with a fire-place at one end, and a large carved bedstead hung with tapestry at the other. Three persons were present besides the patient—a priest, a physician, and a young girl. The latter riveted my attention. A face more deathly pale, and more perfect in its pallor, I never saw in life —seldom even in sculpture. She seemed scarcely conscious. Her eyes were fixed and tearless, and her hands fell listlessly at her side.

I remembered the words of the Carmelite in the ball-room, and shuddered. Foul play, it was evident, was here at work. "A refusal at the last extremity, when it would be too late to secure another agent, would be sufficient!" Yet those were her very words. Courage!—let us see what is to be done. If word or act of mine can do right here, it shall not be wanting!

"Have you found the deed?" said one of the priests, in an urgent whisper.

I shook my head, turned over the papers that lay thick upon the table, and, finding a parchment covered with close writing, held it towards him.

"Pshaw! not that. Why, that is the old will, to sign which would ruin all!"

At this moment he drew a second paper from beneath the rest, and thrusting it into my hand, "This is it," he said. "Read it once through, quickly—quickly! See that there is no flaw or quibble to be turned against us. Make all safe, for he is going fast."

I glanced towards the bed, and saw the wreck of what had once been a man of vast proportions and noble features. His eyes were closed; he breathed with difficulty; and save an occasional movement of the head, he seemed unconscious of all around him. The three priests surrounded the bed; and one of

them, bending low, spoke in a voice inaudible to the rest. The patient moved his hand feebly, as if in reply.

"M. le Marquis desires to make the final arrangements for his daughter, and to receive the extreme unction in private," said the priest, turning to the physician, who yet retained his place beside the patient. "Monsieur will oblige us by retiring. His services, alas! can be of no further avail."

The physician rose. He looked from one to another, and glanced suspiciously at the documents on the table.

"M. l'Avocat will retire with me?" he asked

"M. l'Avocat has but just arrived," said the priest, opening the door with an air of polite authority, "and his presence is indispensable."

The physician somewhat lingeringly and reluctantly withdrew. The young girl still sat pale and motionless as ever; the priests

gathered round the bed; and I began hastily glancing over the contents of the deed.

Its purport was to the effect that "M. le Marquis de Saint Roch, feeling the near approach of death, and being humbly and devoutly sensible of the importance of heavenly things, the sanctity and purity of the Roman Catholic Church, the immense benefit conferred by its religious institutions upon the people of all Roman Catholic nations, and the necessity of arming the teachers of the true faith against the encroachments and enmity of heretics and controversialists, had, after mature and deliberate consideration, resolved upon bequeathing the whole of his temporal possessions, including his personal property, houses, plate, carriages, jewels, and estates, to the holy and enlightened Society of the Order of Jesus; reserving only the sum of 50,000 francs for the dowry of Mademoiselle Gabrielle, his daughter, whom he entrusted to the guardianship of the Rever-

end Fathers Eustache and Ambroise, directing that she should be placed by them in the convent of Les Dames Carmelites, Rue Vaugirard, Paris, and there take the veil."

What should I do? The priests were exhorting the dying man, and the young girl never moved.

"Is all ready?" asked the Jesuit.

I made an affirmative sign.

"My son," said he, "thou must suffer thyself to be raised for a moment. The holy document needs thy signature. Courage! the Blessed Virgin herself looks down upon thy work, and a heavenly reward awaits thee!"

He opened his eyes for the first time since I had entered the room, and an expression of religious enthusiasm lighted his pale countenance. The priests lifted him in their arms, and placed the pen in his trembling fingers.

The young girl rose suddenly, and fell on her knees beside the bed.

"Oh! no, father! no—have pity!" she cried, with clasped, imploring hands—"not the convent, father! not the convent—anything but that!"

"Silence, daughter!" said the Jesuit, sternly. "Thy father is dying! Disturb not his soul with the prayers of thy selfish humanity."

The flush passed away from the brow of the patient, and was succeeded by a pallor more ghastly than before.

"I will speak!" sobbed Gabrielle—"I will be heard! Father! father! spare me, for my mother's sake!"

There was a noise in the next room, a sudden battering upon the oaken door, and a man's voice crying loudly, "Let me in! It is I—it is Maurice. Oh! Gabrielle, let me in!"

She seized her father's hand, and covered it with tears.

"Listen, father, listen!" she cried. "It is he—I love him! I love him!"

The dying man raised his head; the cold dews stood upon his forehead; he moved his lips convulsively, but he could articulate no sound. He flung the pen from him.

The Jesuit forced it back into his hand.

"My son," said he, "remember your vow. You have gone too far to defraud the Church of her dues! Will you die a sinner, a rebel, a heretic? Must I refuse you the last consolations of religion? Shall no masses be said for your repose—no saints intercede for your forgiveness? Must I excommunicate your very memory after death?"

The wretched man quailed before these awful words.

"Back, daughter," said the priest, grasping Gabrielle by the arm, and thrusting her forcibly on one side; "speak to him no more!"

The noise in the outer chamber had ceased.

The marquis was seized with a convulsive trembling.

"Quick! the paper!" cried the Jesuit.

I crossed rapidly to the bed, and held the document for him to sign. The stiffening fingers almost refused their office, and he had scarce scrawled his name, when the hand fell heavily, and the last terrible struggle began.

The priests fell upon their knees, and chanted the prayers for the dying; while Gabrielle, terrified and weeping, threw herself before a crucifix that hung beside the bed.

It was soon over. They drew the sheet across his face, and one of them opened the door. There were two persons outside—a lady and a young man. The lady wore the robe of a Carmelite over her rich evening dress, and carried a black visor in her hand. In the young man I recognized Maurice Duhamel. He no longer wore the disguise of a friar. He was deathly pale, and the traces of tears were upon his cheek. They flew to Gabrielle. The

lady took her in her arms, and Maurice bent sadly over her.

"My poor child," said the former, "we have heard all. But be comforted; everything may not yet be lost. I will appeal to the law—to the First Consul himself; and if our earthly judges be against us, there is yet a Higher Tribunal, by which all virtue is recompensed, and all crime punished!"

Maurice turned to me in a sudden access of fury.

"And you, sir—you!" he cried, "you, who might have averted this calamity, what have you to say to this poor girl? Do you not rejoice in the sight of the misery you have aided to inflict upon us?"

"Silence!" said the priest, with an air of commanding dignity; "this is no place for such expressions. Let the room be cleared, and leave us to pray for the soul of the departed. Young man, respect the presence of the dead."

He turned towards the lady.

"Madame la Baronne," he said, "your brother has died in the fulfilment of a sacred duty. I beseech you retire to your apartments, and make it your task to soothe the anguish of your niece, till we, her guardians, can relieve you of that office, by placing her under the protecting care of Les Dames Carmelites."

I thought it now time to interfere. I removed my mask. An exclamation of surprise burst from the lips of all present. The Jesuits turned pale, and drew back.

"Stop," I said, eagerly, "let us not be too hasty. Perhaps, after all, there may be no occasion for Mademoiselle de Saint Roch to enter the society of Les Dames Carmelites!" And I pointed to the deed which lay beside me on the table.

The Jesuit sprang forward, uttered a hoarse cry, and dropped into a chair.

I had substituted the old will for the deed

of gift—the old will, by which Gabrielle was left sole heiress to her father's wealth; free to live, to marry, to be happy! She threw herself on her knees before me; while Maurice, dumb, flushed, and trembling, supported himself against the mantel-piece.

"Dread the vengeance of the Church for this, Monsieur!" said the Jesuit, rising and moving towards the door.

I smiled, and shook my head.

"I am an Englishman," I said. "You dare not touch me. I might, if I chose, tell something of the bribe of ten thousand francs offered for aid in extorting money from a dying man!"

"You are our saviour!" murmured Gabrielle, as I raised and led her to a seat.

Maurice came to me with extended hands.

"And is it to you, *mon ami*, that we are indebted for this deliverance?" he cried passionately. "Is it to you?"

"By no means," I replied, pointing to my dress, and to the visor, lying on the floor—"you have to thank the Grey Domino!"

CHAPTER VI.

CAIN.

I HAD already made some way in my profession, when I went over to France about sixteen years ago, to study under Paul Delaroche. The great master was absent from Paris at the time of my arrival, and for some weeks I wandered from church to church, from gallery to gallery, dreaming, hoping, worshipping. I spent long days in the Louvre. To me the place was sacred; and I well remember how I often stood gazing into the golden glooms of a Rembrandt, or the airy distances of a Claude, till tears of boyish

enthusiasm shut away the pictures from my sight.

While I was yet revelling in this delicious liberty, I visited the Luxembourg gallery for the first time. It was on a superb morning in June. There had been a shower, and the rain-drops were yet glittering on the acacias. The clouds had cleared off; white statues gleamed here and there among the trees; and the great glass dome of the Observatoire looked all glad and golden in the sunshine.

I turned away reluctantly from the brilliant gardens, and passed through the little side-door leading to the upper rooms of the palace. I was devoted, at this time, to the elder schools of art, and felt but little interest in the works of my contemporaries; so I strolled on listlessly from room to room, pausing now and then before a Flandrin or a Paul Delaroche, but caring little for the collection as a whole.

At last, in the obscurest corner of a small,

ıl-lighted room, I came upon a picture that ıiveted my attention the moment I beheld it. Γhe subject was "Cain after the murder of Abel;" the artist's name, Camille Prévost.

Never, while I live, shall I forget the thrill with which I first beheld that fearful painting; never that ghastly landscape, and that still more ghastly face! The murderer stood on a bleak precipice, his head half turned, as if looking over his shoulder towards the spectator. The red sun was setting behind a gloomy forest on the far horizon. The sky and stagnant ocean were bathed in a copper-coloured glow. A snake glided through a foreground of loathsome weeds; and a distant vulture hovered in the air, as if scenting the first drops of human blood.

Powerful as it was, however, the design had less to do with the effect of this strange picture than the marvellous poetry of the execution. There was a dramatic unity about it which I find it impossible to describe—an at-

mosphere of death and horror that seemed to foul the very air around it. The face of Cain was instinct with unearthly meaning. The cold sweat stood in visible beads upon his brow, and his eyes were fixed as if upon some fearful vision. The very sea beyond looked thick and lifeless. The very trees were like funereal plumes.

When I went out, the sunshine of the summer afternoon offended my eyes. I chose a shady avenue, and there paced to and fro, thinking of the picture. Evening came, and it still haunted me. I strove to shake off the weird influence. I stepped into one of the theatres—but the laughter, the music, the lights were alike insupportable to me. Then I went home to my books, but could not read—to bed, but sleep forsook my pillow.

Thus the night wore past, and morning found me again at the Luxembourg. I had come too early; and I rambled about with fe-

verish impatience till the gallery was opened. I spent the whole of that day before the painting. I resolved to copy it. The next day I had taken up my position *en permanence*, and begun my task.

From this moment the picture began to exercise a strange, mysterious influence upon my whole being. I dreaded it, yet could not tear myself from it. My health suffered; my nerves were painfully overwrought; my sleep and appetite failed. I started at the merest sound; I trembled as I crossed the public streets. Unless when in the very act of painting, my hand lost its steadiness and my eye its certainty. I could not endure the light of an unshaded candle—nor pour out a glass of water without spilling it.

This was but the first stage of my disease. The second was still more distressing.

A morbid fascination now seemed to bind me to the picture, and the picture to me. I felt as if I could not live away from it. Cain be-

came for me as a living man, or something more than man, having possession of my will, and transfixing me with the bright horror of his eyes. At night, when the gallery was closed, I used to linger in the neighbourhood for hours, unable to break the spell that chained me to my task; and when at last, worn out with fatigue, I went home and flung myself upon my bed, I lay awake half the night, or slept to dream of that which haunted me when waking.

Let it not be supposed that I yielded myself a willing victim to this monomania. Far from it. I wrestled with my torment—I reasoned, struggled, combated—but all in vain. It was too strong for me; and I had no one to help me in the fight. I felt at last that I might die or go mad, and there would be none to weep for me. I asked myself over and over again whither I was tending? What I should do? To whom appeal for aid and sympathy? Should I write to my

friends in England? Should I leave Paris? Alas! my volition was gone. I was the slave of the picture, and though at the price of life or reason, I felt I must remain.

Matters were at this crisis (and I believe my senses were fast abandoning me) when a young man, somewhat older than myself, took up his position in the same room, and began copying a picture distant only a few yards from that on which I was employed. His presence irritated me. I felt that I was no longer alone, and I dreaded interruption.

He was a very quiet fellow, however, and so fully respected my taciturnity, that I soon ceased to remember I was no longer alone. His name, I should observe, was Achille Désiré Leroy.

It were both useless and painful to enter upon a more minute analysis of my mental condition. It became each day less and less endurable; as I became each day less capable of resistance. The whole thing wears now,

in my memory, the aspect of a dream—long, vivid, terrible; but still a dream.

At last the time came when body and mind could bear their bondage no longer. The afternoon was dark and oppressive, as if a tempest were brewing. Not a breath of air found its way to the gloomy corner in which I sat at work. The bright, cruel eyes of Cain seemed to pierce my very brain. I felt as if I were being suffocated. My head swam—my heart throbbed—my brush fell from my fingers. All at once I fell back in my chair, uttered a despairing cry, and covered my face with my hands.

"You are ill," said a voice close by.

I turned, and found Achille Leroy standing beside me.

"It is nothing," I faltered.

He shook his head.

"I have been observing you," he said, "for some days past. You are ill; and need not only change of air and scene, but change

of occupation. This picture of Prévost's is not good for you."

"I must finish it," I replied with a shudder.

"We will discuss that question presently," said M. Leroy. "In the meanwhile, a breath of fresh air will do you more service than advice. Lean upon my arm, and come out with me for half an hour into the gardens."

I was passive as a child, and obeyed him without a word. He led me out among the trees, and sought a bench in a retired spot, where we sat down. For some time we were both silent. When at length my companion spoke, it was to urge upon me the abandonment of my undertaking.

"You are wrong," he said, "to set yourself so frightful a task. Let me recommend you to give it up from this moment."

"Alas!" I said, "I cannot."

"Why not? If the copy be a commission,

it is already admirable, and needs not another touch.

"It is not that," I replied gloomily. "I have copied the picture for my own satisfaction—or rather for my own torment—and it has taken a hold upon me that I cannot shake off."

He looked at me with compassionate incredulity.

"If—if you will promise not to regard me as a madman," I added, "I will explain my words."

He promised, and I told him all that I have here recorded. When I had brought my narrative to an end, he rose, walked thoughtfully to and fro under the trees, and then, returning to his seat beside me, said:—

"As a stranger, I have no right to offer you counsel; but, as a brother artist and fellow-student, I feel as if it were my duty to make one more effort. If you will entrust me with the sale of your copy, I will under-

ake to find you a purchaser. But I implore you never again to look upon original or copy while you live. In urging this course upon you, I am actuated by no ordinary motive. I know the picture to be a fatal picture. I know its history, and the history of him who painted it. If you are strong enough to listen to me for a quarter of an hour, I will relate the circumstances to you as briefly as I can."

I expressed my eagerness to hear them; and M. Leroy thus began:

"Camille Prévost was the younger of two brothers. I knew them both intimately. Their father was a *négociant* of moderate fortune, residing a few miles north of Paris. He died about ten years since, leaving the bulk of his property to Hippolyte Prévost, his elder son. Camille was a painter; Hippolyte a *négociant*, like his father. The brothers were both unamiable men. Hippolyte was prudent, cold, and crafty; Camille was sullen,

vindictive, and reserved. I seldom visited Hippolyte after the death of his father; and had I not met Camille daily at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, I have little doubt that our acquaintance would have ceased altogether.

"Camille Prévost was an unloveable man; but, like many unloveable men, he could love, and love passionately. As lovers, these reserved men are exacting; as husbands, jealous; as fathers, harsh; as friends, suspicious. But their attachments, however unpromising, are profound, and, like their enmities, lifelong. Camille loved his cousin, Mademoiselle Dumesnil. She was young, rich, and tolerably handsome, and resided in the Faubourg St. Germain. Camille Prévost was a proud man, and could not endure to owe his social position to any woman, however beloved; so, having made his declaration, and obtained the consent of the lady and her family, he went for three years to Italy, to study the works of the Italian masters, and achieve some fame, if

ɔt some fortune. By the help of great natural ,alent, an iron will, and a dauntless ambition, he rose rapidly in his profession. In the course of the first two years he carried off several prizes at the Academies of St. Luca in Rome and the Belle Arti of Venice; and towards the close of the third sent home a painting of such remarkable merit that it obtained him the rank of Chevalier of the Legion of Honour.

"On receiving intelligence of this great success, he returned to France, radiant with gratified ambition, and elate with hope. But these three years, which had been so fortunate in one way, had proved fatal in another.

"Mademoiselle Dumesnil was married to his brother.

"Wholly unprepared for the blow that awaited him, he had hastened to her hôtel immediately upon his arrival. He asked for Mademoiselle Dumesnil, and was told that Madame Prévost was at home. He found her

at breakfast, and his brother, in his dressing-gown and slippers, sipping his coffee at the opposite corner of the table. Hippolyte had played his cards well; and while Camille was toiling fourteen hours a day in his Roman *atelier*, the unscrupulous elder brother had stepped in, and borne away the bride with her twenty thousand livres of dowry.

"The lady received her former lover as coolly and calmly as if they had never been betrothed. Hippolyte affected cordiality, and pressed his brother to make the Hôtel Prévost his home whenever he might be in Paris. Camille disguised his fury under a mask of stern politeness. He neither wept nor stormed. Outwardly cold and cynical as ever, he betrayed by neither look nor word the passions that raged at his heart. When he took his leave, Monsieur and Madame Prévost flattered themselves that the wanderer had forgotten all about his early love.

"'Three years in Italy, *ma chère*,' said the

husband, as he drew on his gloves, and prepared to take his daily ride in the Bois, 'make wonderful havoc in a lover's memory. Depend on it, he is as glad to have regained his liberty as I am to have relinquished mine.'

"About a week after this, the body of M. Hippolyte Prévost was found in one of the *contre allées* of the Bois de Boulogne, with a bullet in his brain, and his horse feeding quietly beside him.

"There was a long and tedious investigation, the details of which have long since escaped my recollection. Several persons were in turn suspected; but the murder could be brought home to none, and the event was in time forgotten. Camille, having inherited the greater part of his brother's fortune, continued to follow his profession with unabated industry. It was rumoured at first that he would marry his brother's widow; but, on the contrary, he avoided her by every means in

his power; and at last those who had prophesied of his marriage were heard to whisper that he had taken a solemn oath never to see, or speak with her again.

"About this time he began his last and best painting—'Cain after the Murder of Abel.' I need say nothing to you of the merits of this extraordinary work. You have studied it more closely than I, and know it only too well.

"Always misanthropic, Camille Prévost had sunk, ever since his return from Rome, into a dark and sullen melancholy. He shut himself up in his rooms; saw no one; and worked without intermission upon this fatal picture. Day by day, and week by week, he wasted away, beneath the burthen of a fascination which, like yourself, he could neither resist nor control. As the painting progressed, his sufferings became more acute, and his strength diminished. A profound despondency was succeeded by paroxysms of nervous terror. There were times when he would shriek

aloud, as if unable to endure the sight of his own handiwork; and once or twice he was found insensible at the foot of his easel. On one of these occasions his servants called in the nearest medical man, who in vain strove to persuade his patient to lay the picture aside, and try change of air and scene. Camille refused to listen to him, and the doctor's visit was never repeated.

"At last the painting was finished, exhibited, and purchased by the Government.

"As one of our modern masterpieces, it occupies its present position on the walls of the Luxembourg. Doubtless a day will come when, to use the language of the catalogue, 'it will receive a last and honourable asylum in the galleries of the Louvre, where it will take a place beside its illustrious predecessors, and continue the history of French Art.'"

"But the artist?" I exclaimed, when Leroy had brought his story to an end. "What became of Camille Prévost?"

We had risen from our quiet seat under the acacias some minutes back, and were now strolling down the shady side of an old-fashioned street adjoining the gardens. As I spoke, we arrived in front of a large private mansion approached by a pair of ponderous wooden gates thickly studded with bosses of iron. To my surprise, Monsieur Leroy, instead of replying to my question, rang the bell, nodded to the *conçierge*, and requested me to follow him.

We passed through a spacious courtyard, up a flight of steps, and into a large hall paved with alternate squares of black and white marble. Here we were met by an elderly man of mild and benevolent aspect, who shook hands with my companion, and pointed to the staircase.

"You know your way, Monsieur Leroy," he said. "You will find François in the corridor."

To which my fellow-student replied by a

word of acknowledgment, and preceded me up the stairs. At the first landing, we were met by an attendant in a sombre livery of grey and black, who saluted us in silence, and led the way through a long corridor in which were some ten or twelve doors, thickly clamped with iron. Before the last of these he paused, took a key from his pocket, unlocked the door, and stood aside to let us pass.

I found myself in a small sitting-room, neatly but plainly furnished. Close under the window stood an easel, and on the easel an incoherent fantastic daub in oil, more like a paint-smeared palette than a picture. The window, like the door, was closely barred, and looked out into a dreary yard surrounded by high walls. I shuddered. There was a heavy, unnatural silence about the house, a kind of palpable gloom, that chilled me like an evil presence.

"What place is this?" I said. "Why have you brought me here?"

Monsieur Leroy pointed to a door at the farther end of the room, which the attendant proceeded to unlock like the first.

At this moment a frightful scream rang through the rooms—a scream so shrill, so agonized, so dissonant, that I involuntarily covered my face with my hands, as if some awful sight must follow it.

"There is the painter," said Leroy. "There is Camille Prévost."

I looked in. One glance was enough—one glance at a wild, pale, savage face, from which all light of human reason had faded. In Camille Prévost I saw a raging madman, strapped down upon a wooden pallet, laughing, screaming, blaspheming, and crying aloud that he was Cain—Cain, the slayer of Abel!

"And is he really the murderer of his brother?" I asked, as I turned away, cold and horror-stricken.

"God only knows," replied my fellow-student. "This is one of his violent days, and

he always accuses himself when the paroxysm is upon him. At all events, you now know why I have brought you hither. That fatal picture has driven one painter mad, and I was determined it should not do the same by another."

CHAPTER VII.

THE DISCOVERY OF THE TREASURE ISLES.*

IT was on the 26th of October, 1760, at twenty-seven minutes past ten o'clock, a. m., that I shook hands for the last time with those worthy merchants and shipowners, Messrs. Fisher, Clarke, and Fisher, of Bristol. I went at once on board the *Mary-Jane*, then lying alongside the drawbridge by St. Augustine's parade, in the very heart of the old city. It was my first command, so I stepped on deck with some little pride of heart, and bade the men weigh anchor. My exultation may

* From a MS. found on a bookstall.

be pardoned when it is recollected that I was only twenty-six years of age, and naturally thought it a fine thing to be captain of a tight little trading schooner like the *Mary-Jane*, with a valuable cargo on board, and a mate, three sailors, and a boy under my absolute authority.

The flags were flying from every masthead and steeple, and the bells were pealing clamorously, as we worked out of port that morning; for it was the very day of the king's* accession, and all Bristol was wild with loyalty. I remember as well as if it were yesterday, how the sailors cheered from the ships as we went down the Avon; and how my men threw up their hats in reply, and shouted, "Long live King George!" The Avon, however, was soon left behind, and we entered the Bristol Channel with a favourable

* The writer alludes, evidently, to King George III., who was proclaimed throughout the kingdom on the 26th Oct., 1760; King George II. having died suddenly, at Kensington, on the 25th.

wind, all sail set, and a sky brilliant with sunshine above our heads. We were bound, I should observe, for Jamaica, and carried a cargo consisting chiefly of printed goods, hardware, and cutlery, which it was my duty to deliver to the consignee at Kingston. This done, my instructions were to ship a return cargo of cotton, indigo, rum, and other West Indian products. Perhaps it may be as well to add that the *Mary-Jane* carried about a hundred tons burthen, that my name is William Burton, and my mate's name was Aaron Taylor.

The *Mary-Jane* was not a quick sailer, as I soon discovered; but she was a good, sound, steady little craft, and I consoled myself by remembering that safety was better than speed. It was dusk before we reached Lundy Island, and almost daylight next morning when we passed the Land's-End. This was slow work; but as the wind had shifted a point or two during the night, I made the best

of matters, and tried to hope we should do better by-and-by. After tossing about somewhat roughly off the Bay of Biscay, we made Cape Finisterre on the 4th of November; and on the 18th put in at Terceira for water. Having remained here for the best part of two days, we put to sea again on the evening of the 20th. The wind now began to set in more and more against us, and ended by blowing steadily from the South; so that, although we had glorious weather overhead, we made almost as little way as if we had had storms to contend against. At length, after a week of ineffectual beating about, just as I was going to turn the ship's head and run back to Terceira, the breeze shifted suddenly to the North. The N. W. would have suited us better; but if we could not get exactly the wind we most wanted, we were thankful, at all events, to tack about, and make such progress as was possible.

Thus we went forward slowly towards the

tropics, attended by perpetual sunshine and cloudless skies, and enjoying a climate that grew milder and more delicious every day. The incidents of our voyage, up to this time, had been few and unimportant. A Dutch merchantman seen one morning in the offing —a porpoise caught by one of the crew—a flight of swallows on the wing—a shark following the ship. These, and similar trifles, were all the events that befel us for many a week; events which are nothing when related, and yet afford matter for vivid interest to those on shipboard. At length, on the 15th of December, we entered the tropic of Cancer; and on the 19th sailed into a light sea-fog, which surprised us very much at such a season, and in such a latitude; but which was welcome, nevertheless, for the sun's heat was now becoming intense, and seemed as if it would burn the very deck beneath our feet. All that day the fog hung low upon the sea, the wind fell, and the waters were

lulled almost to a calm. My mate predicted a hurricane; but no hurricane came. On the contrary, sea and air stagnated more and more; and the last breath of wind died away as the sun went down. Then the sudden tropical night closed in, and the heat grew more oppressive than before.

I went to my cabin to write, as was my custom in the evening; but, though I wore only a thin linen suit, and kept every port-hole open, I felt as if the cabin was a coffin, and would suffocate me. Having borne it till I could bear it no longer, I threw the pen aside and went on deck again. There I found Aaron Taylor keeping the first watch; and our youngest seaman, Joshua Dunn, at the helm.

"Close night, mate," said I.

"Queerest night *I* ever saw, sir, in these latitudes," replied Aaron.

"What way do we make?"

"None, sir, hardly: scarce one knot an hour."

"Have the men all turned in?"

"All, sir, except Dunn and me."

"Then you may turn in too, mate," said I. "I'll keep this watch and the next myself."

The mate touched his hat, and with a glad "ay, ay, sir," disappeared down the companion-ladder. We were so small a crew that I always took my turn at the watch, and to-night, feeling it impossible to stay below, willingly charged myself with the double duty.

It was now about ten o'clock. There was something almost awful in the heavy stillness of the night, and in the thin, white, ghastly fog that folded round us on all sides, like a shroud. Pacing to and fro along the solitary deck, with no other sounds to break the silence than the murmuring of the water along the ship's side, and the creaking of the wheel in the hands of the steersman, I fell into a profound reverie. I thought of

my friends far away; of my old home among the Mendip hills; of Bessie Robinson, who had promised to become my wife when I went back after this voyage; of a thousand hopes and projects, far enough removed from the schooner *Mary-Jane*, or any soul on board. From these dreams I was suddenly roused by the voice of Joshua Dunn shouting in a quick, startled tone—"Ship ahoy!"

I was alive in a moment at this cry, for we were at war with both France and Spain at the time, and it would have been no pleasant matter to fall in with an enemy; especially as there had been some fierce fights more than once in these very waters since the war began. So I pulled up in my walk, looked sharply round on all sides, and saw nothing but fog.

"Whereabouts, Josh?" I cried.

"Coming right up, sir, under our weather-bow," replied the steersman.

I stepped aft, and, staring steadily in the direction indicated, saw, sure enough, the faint

glimmer of a couple of lanterns coming up through the fog. To dash down into my cabin, seize a brace of pistols and my speaking-trumpet, and spring up again on deck, just as the spectral outline of a large brig loomed up almost within a stone's throw of the ship's side, was the work of a moment. I then stood silent, and waited, ready to answer if hailed, and willing enough to slip along unobserved in the fog, if our formidable neighbour passed us by. I had scarcely waited a moment, however, before a loud voice, made louder by the use of the trumpet, rang through the thick air, crying :—

"Ship ahoy! What name? Where from? Whither bound?"

To which I replied :—

"Trading schooner *Mary-Jane*—from Bristol to Jamaica. What ship? Where from? Whither bound?"

There was a moment's silence. Then the same voice replied :—

"The *Adventure*. Homeward bound."

The reply was informal.

"Where from?" I repeated. "What cargo?"

Again there seemed some hesitation on the part of the stranger; and again, after an instant's pause, he answered:—

"From the Treasure Isles, with gold and jewels."

From the Treasure Isles, with gold and jewels! I could not credit my ears. I had never heard of the Treasure Isles in my life. I had never seen them on any chart. I did not believe that any such islands existed.

"What Isles?" I shouted, the question springing to my lips as the doubt flashed on my mind.

"The Treasure Isles."

"What bearings?"

"Latitude twenty-two, thirty. Longitude sixty-three, fifteen."

"Have you any chart?"

"Yes."

"Will you show it?"

"Ay, ay. Come aboard, and see."

I bade the steersman lay to. The stranger did the same. Presently her great hull towered up beside us like a huge rock; a rope was thrown; a chain ladder lowered; and I stepped on deck. I looked round for the captain. A tall, gaunt man stood before me, with his belt full of pistols, and a speaking-trumpet under his arm. Beside him stood a sailor with a torch, the light from which flickered redly through the thick air, and showed some twenty men, or more, gathered round the binnacle. All were as silent as ghosts, and, seen through the mist, looked as unsubstantial.

The captain put his hand to his hat, looked at me with eyes that glittered like live coals, and said:—

"You want to see the chart of the islands?"

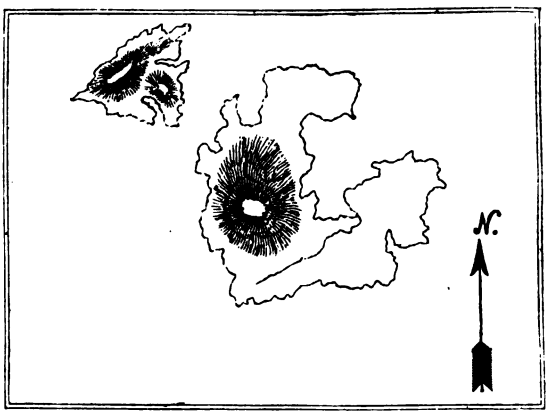
"I do, sir."

"Follow me."

The sailor lighted us down, the captain went first, and I followed. As I passed down the cabin-stairs I eased the pistols in my belt, ready for use if necessary; for there was something strange about the captain and his crew—something strange in the very build and aspect of the ship, that puzzled me, and put me on my guard.

The captain's cabin was large, low, and gloomy, lighted by an oil-lamp swinging from the roof, like a murderer swinging in chains; fitted with old carved furniture that might have been oak, but was as black as ebony; and plentifully garnished about the walls with curious weapons of all kinds of antique shapes and workmanship. On the table lay a parchment chart, elaborately drawn in red ink, and yellow with age. The captain silently laid his finger on the very centre of the parchment, and kept his glittering eyes fixed full upon me.

I leaned over the chart, silent as himself, and saw two islands, a greater and a less, lying just in the latitude he had named, with a narrow strait between them. The larger was somewhat crescent shaped; the smaller inclined to a triangular form, and lay up to the N. W. of the other, just in this fashion—



Both were very irregular in the outline. The little island seemed hilly throughout, the large one was scooped into a deep bay on the N. E. side, and was piled up into what ap-

peared like a lofty mountain between the inner shore of the bay and the western coast. Not far from the southern side of this mountain, a small river was seen to take its rise, flow in a north-easterly direction, and empty itself into the bay.

"And these," said I, drawing a long breath, "are the Treasure Isles?"

The captain nodded grimly.

"Are they under French or Spanish Government?"

"They are under no government," replied the captain.

"Unclaimed lands?"

"Wholly unclaimed."

"Are the natives friendly?"

"There are none."

"None? Then the islands are uninhabited!"

The captain nodded again. My amazement became more profound every moment.

"Why do you call them the Treasure Isles?" I asked, unable to keep my eyes from the map.

The captain of the *Adventure* stepped back, pulled aside a coarse canvas screen that had till now closed in the farther end of the cabin, and pointed to a symmetrical pile of golden ingots—solid golden ingots—about seven feet high and four deep, built row above row in transverse layers, as a builder might have laid the bricks in a wall.

I rubbed my eyes. I looked from the gold to the captain, from the captain to the map, from the map back to the gold.

The captain drew the screen to its place with a hollow laugh, and said:—

"There are two hundred and fifty-seven tons weight of silver in the hold, and six chests of precious stones."

I put my hand to my head, and leaned against the table. I was dazzled, bewildered, giddy.

"I must go back to my ship," said I, still staring covetously at the chart.

The captain took an odd-looking long-necked bottle, and a couple of quaint beakers with twisted stems from a locker close by; filled out a glassful of some kind of rich amber-coloured cordial, and handed it to me with a nod of invitation. Looking closely at the liquid, I saw that it was full of little sparkling fragments of gold ore.

"It is the genuine Golden Water," said the captain.

His fingers were like ice—the cordial like fire. It blistered my lips and mouth, and ran down my throat like a stream of liquid lava. The glass fell from my hand, and was shattered into a thousand fragments.

"Confound the liquor," gasped I, "how hot it is!"

The captain laughed his hollow laugh again, and the cabin echoed to it like a vault.

"Your health," said he; and emptied his own beaker as if it had been a glass of water.

I ran up the cabin stairs with my throat still on fire. The captain followed at a couple of strides.

"Good night," said I, with one foot already on the chain-ladder. "Did you not say latitude twenty-two, thirty?"

"Yes."

"And longitude sixty-three, fifteen?"

"Yes."

"Thanks, sir, and good night."

"Good night," replied the captain, his eyes glowing in his head like fiery carbuncles. "Good night, and a pleasant voyage to you."

With this he burst into a laugh louder and more hollow than ever—a laugh which was instantly taken up, echoed, and re-echoed by all the sailors aboard.

I sprang down upon my own deck in a

towering passion, and swore at them pretty roundly, for a set of unmannerly lubbers; but this seemed only to redouble their infernal mirth. Then the *Adventure* hove off, faded again to a mere spectre, and disappeared in the mist just as the last peal of laughter died away, mockingly, in the distance.

The *Mary-Jane* now resumed her course, and I my watch. The same heavy silence brooded over the night. The same fog closed around our path. I alone was changed. My entire being seemed to have undergone a strange and sudden revolution. The whole current of my thoughts, the very hopes, aims, and purposes of my life, were turned into a new channel. I thought of nothing but the Treasure Isles and their untold wealth of gold and jewels. Why should not I seize upon my share of the spoil? Had I not as good a right to enrich myself as any other man that sailed the seas? I had but to turn the ship's course, and possess the wealth of kingdoms.

Who was to prevent me? Who should gainsay me? The schooner was not my own vessel, it was true; but would not her owners be more than satisfied if I brought them back double the value of her cargo in solid ingots? I might do this, and still have fabulous treasure for myself. It seemed like madness to delay even for a single hour; and yet I hesitated. I had no right to deviate from the route prescribed by my employers. I was bound to deliver my cargo at Jamaica within a given time, wind and weather permitting; and we had already lost weeks upon the way. Beset by alternate doubts and desires, I went to my berth at the close of the second watch. I might as well have tried to sleep in the powder magazine of a burning ship. If I closed my eyes, the parchment chart lay before them as plainly as when I saw it on the captain's table. If I opened them, the two islands appeared as if traced upon the darkness in lines of fire. At length I felt I could lie there

inactive no longer. I rose, dressed, lit my lamp, took out my own book of charts, and set myself to enter the Treasure Isles in their places on the map. Having drawn them in accurately with pencil, and then traced over the pencillings with ink, I felt a little calmer, and turned in again. This time I fell asleep from sheer exhaustion, and woke, dreaming of riches, just at dawn.

My first proceeding was to go on deck and take an observation of our position. The result of this observation was to show me, beyond all doubt, that we were then distant about seventy-two hours' sail from the coast of the larger island; whereupon, I yielded to a temptation stronger than my will or my reason, and changed the ship's course.

That decisive step once taken, I fell into a state of feverish eagerness, which allowed me no rest of body or mind. I could neither sleep, nor eat, nor sit still, nor remain in one spot for three minutes together. I went up

to the masthead twenty times a day on the look-out for land, and raged against the fog, as if it were sent from heaven on purpose to torment me. My seamen thought I was mad; and so I was. Mad with the thirst of gain, as many a sane man has been before and since.

At length, on the morning of the third day, Aaron Taylor came to me in my cabin, and ventured on a respectful remonstrance. We had already deviated, he said, two degrees from our course, and were making straight for the Bahama islands, instead of for Jamaica. Had we kept steadily on our way, we should have shortly touched at Porto Rico for provisions and water; but both were running short, and could not possibly hold out for anything like the time it would take us to make land in the present direction. In reply to this statement, I showed my chart with the two islands sketched in according to their bearings.

He looked at them, shook his head, and

said very earnestly :—"I have sailed in these latitudes for the last fifteen years, your honour, and I'll take my Bible oath there are no such lands."

Whereupon I flew into a violent fit of anger, as if the mate had presumed to doubt my word, and forbade him ever to speak to me on the subject again. My temper, in short, was as much impaired as my peace of mind, or, indeed, as my sense of duty; and gold, accursed gold, was at the bottom of it all!

Thus the third day passed on, and still the fog hung round and seemed to follow us. The seamen did their work sullenly, and whispered together when my back was turned. The mate looked pale and grave, like a man whose mind was full of anxious thoughts. For my part, I was more resolute than ever, and silently vowed to shoot the first sailor who showed a sign of mutiny. To this end I cleaned and primed my pistols, and hid a Spanish dagger between my waist-

coat and my belt. Thus the long, monotonous hours went on, and the sun sank, and yet no land, nor indication of land, had appeared on any side.

Sixty-five hours out of the seventy-two had now gone by, and it seemed as if the remaining seven would never expire. To sleep was impossible; so I paced the deck all night, and watched as eagerly for the first gleam of dawn as if my life depended on it. As the morning drew nearer, my excitement became almost more than I could bear. I even felt as if I would gladly have put off the moment which I had been so passionately awaiting.

At length the eastward grey grew visibly lighter, and was followed by a broad crimson flush all across the heavens. I went up aloft, trembling in every limb. As I reached the top-gallant-mast, the sun rose. I closed my eyes, and for a moment dared not look around me.

When I opened them again, I saw the fog lying all over the calm surface of the sea in fleecy tracts of vapour, like half-transparent snow; and straight ahead, distant some ten miles or so in a direct line, a pale blue peak rising above the level of the mist. At the sight of that peak my heart gave a great leap, and my head turned giddy; for I recognized it instantly as the mountain mapped out between the bay and western coast of the larger island.

As soon as I could command my agitation sufficiently, I pulled out a pocket-glass, and surveyed it narrowly. The glass only confirmed the evidence of my eyes. I then came down, intoxicated with success, and triumphantly bade Taylor go aloft and report all that he should see. The mate obeyed, but declared that there was nothing visible but sky and fog.

I was enraged. I would not believe him. I sent the boy up, and then one of the seamen,

and both returned with the same story. At last I went up again myself, and found that they were right. The fog had risen with the rising of the sun, and the peak had utterly disappeared. All this, however, made no real difference. The land was there; I had seen it; and we were sailing for it, right before the wind. In the meantime, I caused the ship's boat to be got ready, directed that a bag of biscuit, a keg of brandy, a couple of cutlasses, a couple of muskets, a couple of sacks, and a good store of ammunition should be thrown into it; and provided myself with a pocket-compass, tinder-box, hatchet, and small telescope. I then took a slip of parchment, and having written upon it the name and destination of the *Mary-Jane*, together with the date of the year and month, and my own signature as her captain, enclosed the whole in a stout glass bottle, sealed it down with my own seal, and stowed it away in the boat with the rest of the stores. This bottle, and

a small union-jack which I tied round my waist like a sash, were destined to be hoisted on the mountain top as soon as we succeeded in climbing up to it.

My preparations for landing were but just completed, when the mate sung out, "Breakers ahead!" I ran at once on deck. The fog had grown denser than ever. There was no land in sight, though I knew we must be within a mile of the shore. Not even the breakers were visible, but we could hear the roaring of them quite distinctly. I gave orders to lay to immediately; and, taking Taylor aside, told him that it was my intention to go ashore in the boat without a moment's delay. He flung up his hands and implored me not to venture.

"I swear to you, sir," said he, emphatically, "that's there's no land within four hundred miles of us on any side. These are coral reefs; and to take a boat amongst them in this fog is to rush on certain destruction. For

Heaven's sake, sir, stay aboard, at least, till the fog clears off!"

But I only laughed, and refused to listen to him.

"There's land, mate," said I, "within a mile. I saw it with my own eyes not two hours ago; and it's a land, let me tell you, that will make the fortune of every man on board. As for the breakers, I'll risk them. If the boat is swamped, it will be no great hardship to swim to shore."

"It will be death, sir," groaned the mate.

Of this, however, I took no notice, but proceeded to give my instructions. I left the command of the *Mary-Jane* in his hands during my absence, and desired him, if the fog cleared, to anchor in the large bay off which I knew we were lying. I then added that I expected to get back to the vessel before nightfall, but ordered that an exploring party should be sent ashore to search for me, if I

had not returned by the end of eight-and-forty hours. To all this the honest fellow assented reluctantly enough, and bade me farewell with as sorrowful an air as if he were attending me to the scaffold.

The boat was then lowered; I took Josh Dunn for my rower, laid my own hands to the helm, and gave the word to put off. The men on board uttered a feeble cheer as we parted company, and, in less time than it takes to tell, the *Mary-Jane* was hidden from us by the fog.

"Josh," said I, as the sound of the breakers grew more and more audible, "if the boat ships water, we shall have to swim for it."

"Ay, ay, sir," replied Josh, briskly.

"Straight ahead," I continued, "lies dry land; behind us the *Mary-Jane*. But a small schooner is more easily missed in a fog, Josh, than an island as big as Malta or Madeira."

"Ay, ay, sir," replied Josh, as before.

"If you're wise," said I, "you'll strike out for the shore, as I shall. In the meanwhile, we had better fill our pockets with biscuit, for fear of accidents."

I then divided the contents of the biscuit-bag, and we stuffed our pockets as full as they could hold. By this time, the noise had so increased that we could scarcely hear each other's voices, and the white foam was already visible through the mist.

"Steady, Josh," cried I, "there are rough seas before us."

The words were scarcely past my lips when we were tossing in the midst of the surf, drenched with spray, and well-nigh deafened by the roaring of the waters. I saw directly that no boat could live in such a whirlpool—ours did not hold out for five minutes. Flung from billow to billow like a mere cockle-shell, she laboured onwards for something like a hundred yards, filled, heeled over,

and disappeared suddenly from beneath our feet !

Prepared for this catastrophe, I rose like a cork, glued my arms to my sides, kept my mouth and eyes shut, and suffered the waves to carry me along. Finding, however, that instead of bearing me towards the shore, they only dashed me hither and thither among the breakers. I presently gave up all hope of floating in, and, being an excellent swimmer, struck out for land. Blinded, buffeted, breathless, now carried to the summit of a mighty wave, now buried in the very heart of a mountain of green sea, now fighting forward again, in spite of wind and spray, I struggled on with a superhuman energy that only the love of life and riches could have inspired. Suddenly, my feet touched land—lost it—touched again. I threw all my strength into one last, desperate effort, precipitated myself through the raging foam that broke like a vast barrier all along the

shore, and fell, face downwards, on the pebbly beach beyond.

I lay there for some minutes, just within reach of the spray, and beyond the line of the breakers, so utterly spent and stupefied as to be scarcely conscious of the danger from which I had escaped. Recovering, however, by degrees, I rose, looked around, and found myself on a shelving belt of shingle that reached far away on either side till lost in the fog. Beyond the shingle ran a line of low cliffs, along the summits of which, looking dim and distant in the misty air, rose the feathery tops of a far-stretching forest of cocoa-nut palms. Here, then, was the island, palpable, undeniable, actual! I took up a handful of loose pebbles—stamped on the shingle—ran along the beach. In all this there was no illusion. I was awake, sober, in full possession of my senses. All was as it seemed—all tried, and proved, and real.

Passing instantaneously from a state of

wonder, half confused, half incredulous, to a wild, unbounded joy, I ran about for some minutes like a maniac—shouting, leaping, clapping my hands, and giving way to the most extravagant demonstrations of triumph. In the midst of this folly, the thought of Josh Dunn flashed across my mind. I grew sober in a moment. What had become of the poor fellow? I had never seen him from the instant when the boat capsized. Had he swum for the ship or the shore? Was he saved or lost? I went backwards and forwards along the beach, dreading to see his corpse washed up by every coming wave, but found no trace of him in any direction. Convinced, at length, that further search was hopeless, I gave it up, and turned my face and footsteps towards the cliffs.

It was now, as nearly as I could calculate, about ten o'clock in the day. The heat was tempered by the fog and the sea-breeze, and I promised myself to reach the mountain-top

before sunset. Making straight across the beach to a point where the cliffs looked somewhat lower and more broken than elsewhere, I succeeded in climbing up the face of the rock without much difficulty, and in gaining the skirts of the palm-forest above. Here I flung myself down in the shade, and proceeded to examine the contents of my pockets. The rum, ammunition, and other loose stores were lost with the boat; but I found that I was still in possession of all that I had stowed about my person. One by one, I brought out my tinder-box, telescope, pocket-compass, clasp-knife, and other trifles; all of which (except the compass, which was enclosed in a tight tin case) were more or less damaged by the sea-water. As for the biscuit, it was reduced to a nauseous pulp, which I flung away in disgust, preferring to trust to the cocoa-nuts for my subsistence. Of these I saw hundreds clustered overhead; and, being by this time quite ready

for breakfast, I climbed the tree against which I had been lying, brought down three or four nuts, and made a delicious meal. I then unscrewed and cleaned the glasses of my telescope, consulted my compass, and prepared to continue my journey. Finding by the position of the needle that the north lay to the right, following the line of shore below, I concluded that I must have swum to land at some point of the eastern extremity of the bay where I had hoped to anchor. This being the case, I had but to march due west in order to arrive at the foot of the mountain, which I proposed to myself as the object of my first day's exploration. Due west I turned accordingly, and, compass in hand, took my way through the green shade of the forest. Here the coolness, the silence, the solitude, were perfect. I could not hear my own footsteps for the moss that carpeted the ground; and though I saw several birds of brilliant plumage, they uttered no kind of note, but sat like painted creatures

on the boughs, and looked at me without any sign of fear. Once or twice, I saw a small long-tailed monkey flitting like a squirrel through the uppermost tree-tops; but it was gone in a moment, and seemed only to make the place more wild and solitary. On every side, like graceful columns supporting the roof of some vast temple, rose hundreds of slender palm-stems, ringed with the natural record of their yearly growth; whilst here and there, through openings in the boughs, came glimpses of blue sky and shafts of golden sunlight.

When I had walked thus for about a mile and a half, finding the atmosphere growing clearer and brighter at every step, I suddenly emerged upon a grassy plain studded with trees like an English park, and traversed by a small winding river that glittered like moving silver in the open sunshine. Beyond this plain, at the distance of about another mile and a half, lay a second forest, more extensive

apparently, than the first; and beyond that again, defined so clearly against the deep blue sky that I could almost have believed I might touch it with my hand, rose a steep and rugged peak, clothed half-way up with trees, and surmounted by some kind of building, with a beacon on the top. The height of this peak I calculated at something less than two thousand feet. I recognized it at once as the same which I had sighted from the masthead of the *Mary-Jane* at sunrise that morning. I also recognized the plain and river, each lying in its proper geographical position, according to the chart.

Finding my every hope becoming corroborated as I went on, I now made no question as to the result of my undertaking, but pushed gaily forward, and amused myself by speculating about the treasure. Where should I find it? In what form? Perhaps we should have to mine for it; and in that case I made up my mind to seek all round the island, if ne-

cessary, for some safe harbour in which to anchor the *Mary-Jane*. I should then land all my crew, build a few temporary huts, and set the men hard to work at digging and smelting, till our little ship would hold not another ingot. This done, I would sail straight for Jamaica, lodge my treasure in some colonial bank, purchase a large vessel, engage a numerous crew, and return at once for a fresh cargo of riches. What was to prevent me, indeed, from coming again and again, and carrying hence such wealth as no king or kaiser in all the world could boast?

Absorbed in dreams of untold grandeur and power, I felt neither fatigue nor heat, nor was conscious of the miles I traversed. There was now no fog, nor sign of fog, and the atmosphere was magically clear and bright. A soft air blew from the west. The rich grass of the savannah was thick with flowers. Even the mossy glades of the second forest were radiant with purple and scarlet berries, which

I dared not taste, although they gave out a delicious odour. This forest proved more extensive than the first, and was more closely planted. All at once, just as I began to wonder how much farther it would lead me, I found myself upon the inner verge of the woods, with a strange and startling panorama before my eyes.

The forest terminated abruptly, about half a mile from the foot of the mountain, and lay round it in one vast circular sweep, a zone of living green. Between these woods and the mountain lay the domes, obelisks, and ivy-mantled walls of a noble city, all deserted and in ruins. In the midst of these ruins rose the great solitary mountain towards which I had been journeying so long. More ruins were clustered about the base of it, and for some way up the lower slopes and buttresses of its sides. Above these came trees and underwood, and, towering higher still against the sky, a lofty peak of rock and rugged precipice.

Examining this peak by theaid of my telescope, I saw some kind of small white edifice upon the very summit, surmounted, apparently, by a pyramidal ornament supporting a glittering beacon. This beacon was the same that I had seen scintillating in the morning light. On reaching the inner verge of the first forest, I observed it long and earnestly. Was it made of glass, or of some reflecting metal? Did it revolve? Or were these brilliant flashes, which seemed almost as if emanating from its very substance, mere refractions of the sunlight? These were questions which I found it impossible to solve without nearer observation. I could only turn my eyes away, dazzled and half blinded, and then press forward, more eagerly than ever, on my way.

A few yards brought me to a huge mound of shattered masonry, which, as far as I could see, ran all round the ruins like a line of fortification, in some places higher, in some lower, and overgrown in every part with trees

and creeping plants. Having scrambled over this first obstacle, I found myself close against the remains of a lofty circular building, with a domed roof. The portals of this building were carved with strange hieroglyphics, and the dome yet showed traces of faded gold and colours. Finding the entrance choked with fallen rubbish, I passed on as quickly as the uneven nature of the ground would permit, and came next upon a small quadrangular edifice, built, as it seemed, of the purest white marble, and engraved all over with arabesques, and mythologic birds and beasts. Being unable to distinguish any kind of entrance, I concluded that it was a tomb. Then came another domed temple, the roof of which was plated with what looked like sheets of solid gold; then a vast number of tombs all together, some of white, some of red, and some of green marble; then a hillocky space of undistinguishable *débris;* then an obelisk inlaid with various kinds of jasper and onyx;

and then, partly built up against, and partly excavated in, the rocky base of the central peak, close beneath which I was now standing, a building of grander dimensions than any I had yet seen. The front, defaced as it was, rose to a clear height of at least three hundred feet. The great entrance was supported on either side by a colossal stone image, half man, half eagle, which, though buried in rubbish half way to the knees, yet stood full fifty feet clear in sight. From the middle of the roof rose a kind of low, broad pyramid, fantastically ornamented in gold and colours.

In this temple, I felt sure I should find treasure. My only difficulty would be to force an entrance. The great portals were literally blocked up by a mass of broken sculpture that seemed to have fallen from the façade immediately above the entrance. Over and among the rubbish and *débris* had grown a tangled mass of underwood, trailing plants, and huge prickly growths of the cactus tribe.

The hand of man could scarcely have barricaded the approach to the sanctuary of his gods more effectually than time and decay had done.

With only a pocket-knife, I knew that it would be hopeless to attempt to cut my way through such a jungle; I therefore left the front, and made a survey of the temple from the sides where it projected from the face of the rock. Even this was no easy matter, for the area all about it was strewn with great mounds of bush-grown rubbish, over which I had to climb as I best could, without heeding how my hands and face were wounded in the effort. All this time I could see no sign of any openings or windows, by which the building could have been lighted, or any other doorway than the great entrance on the other side.

At length it occurred to me that I might find some means of penetrating to the interior of the building by climbing that part of the

mountain against which it was reared, and finding some way of dropping down upon the roof. So I went on a little farther, to a point where the ascent looked somewhat less difficult than elsewhere, and succeeded in clambering up to a ledge that commanded the roof of the temple. It lay before me like a vast terrace, with the pyramid in the midst. Comparatively free from the rubble that strewed every foot of the ground below, it was only grass-grown and mossy, with a few young trees and bushes springing up here and there where the dust of ages had deposited sufficient nourishment for their roots. I sprang down upon it, and proceeded to reconnoitre the surface from end to end, taking good care, all the while, lest I should step on some weak spot, and be precipitated into the chasm below. It was well that I did so. Having gone half-way along from the back towards the front, and left the pyramid a few feet behind me, I came suddenly upon what

seemed like a great pit, over the edges of which the bushes clung suspended, and linked their tangled boughs together, as if they feared to fall. I drew back startled, for another step would have carried me over. I peered in—all below was dark and unfathomable. I traced the boundaries of the pit, and found that it was an oblong parallelogram, constructed evidently for the purpose of giving light to the interior. Here, then, was an unobstructed opening into the building, but one of which it would be impossible to avail myself without the aid of a ladder. I tore away a bush that grew at the verge of the chasm, and, flinging myself down at full length, shaded my eyes with one hand, and looked into the abyss below. For some minutes I could see nothing—all seemed intensely dark, like the crater of an extinct volcano. At length, one dim outline after another became faintly visible. I distinguished mounds of stones and rubbish, which had probably fallen

from the inside of the ceiling, and the lower limbs of another colossal figure, the upper part of which I could only have seen by descending into the building. It was in vain that I leaned over till another inch would have caused me to lose my balance. It was in vain that I tested the strength of every bush and creeper all round the opening. This was all that I had gained, or could hope to gain, in return for my labour in mounting there.

I rose at last, slowly and reluctantly, and paused to think what it was best for me next to do. The city lay at my feet—the mountain rose high above my head. At the level on which I now stood, and for some distance higher up the mountain side, were scattered several more of those small buildings which I had concluded must be places of sepulture. Should I examine these, in the hope of finding some access to the probable treasures buried with the dust of their inmates? or

should I pursue my first design of ascending the peak, planting the English flag on the summit, and beginning my explorations with a thorough observation of the whole city and surrounding country? I did not waste much time in hesitation. I felt as yet almost unwearied, despite my exertions and my long night's watch; and I decided for the ascent.

It was a difficult task, and needed all the energy and perseverance of which I was master.

The first two hundred yards or so, where the slope was less abrupt, and the terraces were covered with buildings, were comparatively easy; and here I could not resist turning aside for a few minutes to examine a tomb which seemed to be more dilapidated than any which I had yet encountered. As I drew nearer, I found that it bore every mark of having been broken open at some not very distant time. It was a simple square build-

ing of white marble, with a dome-shaped roof. This roof had evidently received several blows from some sharp instrument, and was cracked and chipped in many places. A large portion of the masonry at one end had also been removed, and piled back against the spot where it had been broken open.

An irresistible curiosity impelled me to displace the stones again, and see the inside of the chamber. The blocks were ponderous, and I dragged them out with difficulty. As I did so, one rolled down the slope, and fell crashing through the bushes, a hundred and fifty feet below, whereupon a number of gorgeous birds rose screaming into the air, and flapped heavily away.

"What a fool I am!" I said aloud, as I wiped the perspiration from my brow, and paused to rest; "what a fool I am to exhaust myself thus, when others have been before me, and have, no doubt, rifled the place of anything that might have been valuable!

Well, never mind; those others have, at all events, done the worst of the work, and I may as well see whether it was really a tomb, and whether the rest of them are likely to be worth our trouble hereafter."

So I went on again with a will, and found, to my satisfaction, that when the three or four large marble blocks were fairly rolled away, only small stones and rubble remained. These were rapidly cleared out, and in about another quarter of an hour I had succeeded in making a space large enough to enable me to creep in. Having done so, and found that I could stand upright inside the building, I waited till my eyes had grown accustomed to the darkness. Gradually, as before, one object and then another became visible, and I found that the place was beyond all doubt a sepulchre.

The inner chamber measured about six feet by ten, and was closed in by a ceiling, about three inches above my head. The walls were

lined with slabs of the purest alabaster, engraved all over with strange characters. The ceiling was rudely painted with representations of birds, fishes, plants, and beings half human and half brute. Some broken urns of dark blue pottery lay scattered about the floor, and at the farther end of the chamber, on a raised shelf of plain white marble, stood an alabaster coffer, the lid of which, shattered in a dozen fragments, lay close by. It was too dark for me to see to the bottom of this coffer, but I put my hand in, and found it, as I had expected, empty. Just as I was withdrawing my fingers, however, they encountered a small object that felt like a pea. I seized and brought it to light. It was a fine pearl, somewhat discoloured by the damp, but as large as an ordinary holy-berry.

This discovery made my heart leap for joy, and rewarded me for all the trouble I had given myself to break into this tomb. The pearl itself was probably of no great value, but it

was an earnest of what I might hope to find in those tombs which as yet had never been disturbed by previous adventurers. I put it inside my tinder-box for safety, and promised myself the pleasure of displaying it to the crew of the *Mary-Jane*, in proof of the booty that awaited us.

"If there is treasure in the tombs," thought I, exultingly, "what may we not hope to find in the temples and palaces?"

My head swam with visions of wealth. I pictured to myself temples with costly altars, and sacrificial vessels of gold and silver—palaces with unexplored apartments, containing thrones, and royal furniture, and weapons studded with precious stones—tombs filled with gorgeous ornaments of buried kings. Aladdin's garden of jewels was not more lavish of wonder than became now to me the ruins of this forgotten city. Then came the bewildering thought that all the riches of this vanished race were mine.

The island was unclaimed, uninhabited, unpossessed. It was mine to explore, to ransack, to plunder at my pleasure.

I crept out of the tomb and exultingly breathed the fresh air again. I looked up at the great peak, which I could hardly be said to have even begun to ascend. The sun seemed as yet scarcely to have moved in the heavens, and the glorious day was still at its zenith. I sat down for a few moments to rest, and refreshed my parching throat with a few delicious purple berries that grew upon the bushes close beside me. Then I took out my pearl and examined it again in the open daylight. The sight seemed to stimulate me—I rose, replaced it in the box, and resumed my task.

In a few minutes, I had left the last terrace and the last tomb below my feet, and had entered upon that part of the ascent where the rock grew steeper and was overgrown with thorny underwood, through which I had

to force a passage as I could. I did force it, however, though my hands and face bled for it, and my clothes were well-nigh torn to pieces on my back. Panting and exhausted, I at length fought through the belt of brushwood and emerged upon the bare rock above.

Hence the barren peak rose, steep and sheer, some twelve hundred feet above my head. At the sight of these awful precipices, my heart sunk within me. There was no visible footing for even a goat, as far as I could see; and scarce a twig, or blade of grass, for the climber to hold by. Thinking that it might possibly be less steep elsewhere, I contrived to work my way round more to the westward, and there, sure enough, found the commencement of what seemed like a gigantic staircase, hewn roughly out from the very substance of the rock. Each step of this ascent was from three to four feet in height. Some were cut in deep shelves, on

which three or four persons could have lai down at length; others were so narrow a scarcely to afford space for the foot; an many were quite broken away, which tenfol increased the difficulty of climbing. By th help, however, of perseverance, great naturt agility, a cool head, and a resolute will, sprang, clambered, and swung myself, some how or another, from shelf to shelf of thi perilous staircase, only pausing now and the to rest, and look down at the widening land scape. At length I found my feet on the las step, and the summit, which had hitherto bee hidden by the impending precipices, clos above my head.

That summit was artificially heightened b a kind of shelving platform, like a pyrami with the apex cut away. On the top of thi platform stood a massive square building o white marble, with a large open entranc looking east; and this building served in turn as the pedestal to a gigantic idol, which sat

cross-legged and hideous, with its face to the setting sun. Sitting as it was, the image measured at least twenty feet in height, and wore on its head a large ornament of some strange and dazzling substance, which almost blinded me, at first, by its intolerable splendour. When I had somewhat recovered the command of my sight, I went nearer and examined it. To my amazement, I found this idol to be one incrustation of precious stones from head to foot. The body was carved in jasper; the legs and arms in red onyx; the hands, feet, and face in the purest alabaster. Round its neck, inlaid upon the surface of the jasper ground, ran a rich collar of turquoises and garnets; round its waist a belt of great emeralds; round its ankles, wrists, arms, and knees, elaborate bands of amethysts and opals. Each eye was represented by a ruby as large as a crown piece. From its ears hung enormous pendants of the purest sapphires, each the size of an ordinary hen's egg, and

richly mounted in gold. Across its knees lay a golden scimitar, the hilt of which was carved from a single beryl; while on its head . . . . I stared—rubbed my eyes, as if to be sure I was not dreaming—scaled the walls of the building—climbed the shoulders of the idol—examined it from every side—and came at last to the conclusion that this ornament, which I had taken for a beacon far away at sea, was no other thing than one pure, gigantic, inestimable diamond, such as the world had never seen before!

It was almost spherical in shape, though slightly flattened, like the globe, at the two poles; was cut all over in the smallest facets, each of which reflected every colour of the prism; and measured just twenty-two inches and a half in circumference.

When I had in some degree recovered from the state of excitement and wonder into which this great discovery had thrown me, and was cool enough to look down at the

scene below, I saw the whole island at my feet, as if drawn out upon a map.

The smaller island lay close by, to the north-west, separated from this one by a strait of about two miles in width; and all around and about, from the verge of the beach below to the farthest limit of the horizon, stretched one rippling, sparkling, brilliant expanse of sapphire sea, unclouded by a breath of vapour, and unbroken by a single sail. I looked for the *Mary-Jane;* but she was hidden by the cliffs that bounded the eastward coast in the direction where I landed. Then I took out my glass, and made a careful observation of both islands. Scattered up and down the hills of the farther one, I saw the remains of various domed and pyramidal buildings, most of which appeared to be plated on the roofs and sides with gold, and glittered to the sun. Beneath my feet, reaching over a much greater extent of ground than I had at first supposed, lay

the ruins of a vast number of palaces, temples, tombs, and triumphal arches; many of which, especially to the west side of the island, which I had not before seen, were in a high state of preservation, and richly decorated with gilding, painting, sculpture, and precious metals. In all of them, no doubt, were idols made after the pattern of this on which I was perched so unceremoniously, and treasure of every imaginable description.

However, the present and actual were all that concerned me just then; so I left the investigation of the ruins till such time as I could bring my men to help me, and set to work with my clasp-knife, to secure as much as possible of the spoil within my grasp. My first attack was made of course upon the diamond, which I dislodged with infinite difficulty, it being "set" into the head of the idol with some kind of very hard cement, that I had to grate to powder as I went on. When, at last, I had quite freed it, I tied it up in the

union-jack which had been all this time about my waist, and let myself down upon the east side of the building, where I had seen an opening into the basement. Looking inside this opening, I found the whole interior filled with human skulls; which somewhat startled me. I made room among them, however, for my diamond, and then climbed up again to secure a few more stones. This time I fell upon the idol's eyes and ear-rings, which I soon transferred to my own pockets; and, having knocked out some of the great emeralds from his belt, and one or two of the largest opals from his bangles and bracelets, and taken possession of his golden scimitar for my own use, I made up my mind to rest from my labours for this day, and go back by the way I had come. So I tied the loose stones up with the diamond, secured the bundle to my belt, buckled the scimitar to my side, and prepared to descend the mountain. Loaded as I was now, however, this proved no easy matter; but I got

to the bottom at last, after some perilous falls and scrambles; took the same route through the ruins, scaled the outer line of wall as before, and plunged into the forest.

The sun was low in the heavens, and I was thoroughly exhausted by the mental and physical exertions of the day. I doubted whether it would be possible for me to reach the coast before sunset; and I stood in great need of food and rest. The shade and silence of the woods—the springy moss, offering a natural carpet to my feet—the cocoa-nuts and fragrant berries all around, were temptations not to be resisted; so I decided to spend the night in the forest, and proceeded to choose my lodging. A snug bank at the foot of a clump of banana and cocoa trees was soon found; and here, with a pile of cocoa-nuts by my side, my precious bundle at my feet, and my scimitar lying ready to my hand, I lay down, ate a hearty supper, and settled myself for the night.

The sun went down upon the silence of the forest. Not a bird twittered—not a monkey chattered—not an insect hummed near. Then came darkness and the southern stars; and I fell into a profound sleep.

I awoke next morning with the dawn; breakfasted on a cocoa-nut, drank the milk of two or three others; and set off, compass in hand, towards the coast. As I went along, I remembered all at once, with a sense of shame at having forgotten it till then, that it was the morning of Christmas-day, which, though summer-time out here in this tropical latitude, was a wintry epoch enough far away in England among those who loved me! Christmas-day, when the quiet grey-turreted church in my native village would be garlanded with holly; when many a true heart would ache for my absence; when many a prayer for my safety would be whispered as the Litany was read; and my health be drunk loudly at the Christmas-feast! And I—what had I

been doing all this time? Lost in ambitious dreams, had I given a single thought to those who gave so many thoughts to me? Had I longed for wealth, and dared danger and death, to share my riches with them and make them happy? My heart smote me at these questions, and I brushed away two or three remorseful tears. I saw how selfish had been my aims, and soothed my conscience with a number of good resolutions, all of which were to be carried out when I returned to England with a shipload of jewels and gold.

Absorbed in these wholesome reflections, I traversed the mazes of the forest, crossed the flowery savannah, and threaded the majestic glades of the cocoa-woods that lay nearest the shore. Emerging, by-and-by, in sight of the beach and the sea, I saw, to my surprise and satisfaction, the *Mary-Jane* lying close up against the cliffs, in a little rocky cove not half a mile away. The next instant, I had scrambled down the cliff as

recklessly as if it had been a mere slope of smooth lawn, and was running towards the ship at my utmost speed, only pausing every now and then to shout and wave my hat, in case any of the crew were on the look-out for me. No answering shout, however, bade me welcome. Not a head appeared above the ship's side. Not even a pennant fluttered from the mast-head. Had the crew deserted the *Mary-Jane*, and gone up the island in search of treasure for themselves?

At this thought I ran on again, breathless, but very angry. As I drew nearer, however, my anger gave place to a kind of terrified bewilderment. I hesitated—ran forward again—stood still—trembled—could not believe the evidence of my eyes; for at every step the aspect of the *Mary-Jane* grew more strange and startling.

She was lying high and dry upon the beach—a wreck! Her shrouds were hanging in shreds; her hull was clustered thick with

barnacles; her sails were white with mould; her anchor, broken and covered with rust, lay some yards off, half buried in the sand. Could she be the same little schooner that I had left only yesterday, as trim and stout as when she was turned out of the builder's yard? Was that indeed her name still visible in letters half effaced? Was I mad or dreaming?

I had now come up close under her bulwarks. I walked slowly round and round her, three or four times, quite dumb and stupefied. It was impossible that she could be the same ship. Her build, her size, her name, it is true, seemed precisely those of my little schooner; but common sense, and the testimony of my own reason, forbade me to believe that twenty-four hours could have done the work of twenty-four years. Here was a vessel that had been deserted for perhaps a quarter of a century, and had rotted where it lay. It was a coincidence—a strange, dramatic, incredible coincidence—nothing more.

I looked round for some means of clambering on board this ruin, and succeeded in finding the end of a broken chain. It hung rather short, but I caught it by a leap, and hauled myself up, hand over hand. In another moment I stood upon her deck. The timbers of that deck were all gaping and rotten, and overgrown with rank fungi. A sea-bird had built its nest in the binnacle. Some smaller nests, deserted and gone to wreck like the ship herself, clung to the rotten shrouds. One boat yet hung in its place, by ropes that looked as if a touch would break them to tinder. The other boat—just precisely the small one which would have been missing if this were indeed all that remained of the *Mary-Jane*—was gone from its moorings.

Curiosity, and something deeper than mere curiosity, took me down the crazy stairs, and into the captain's cabin. It was a foot deep in water, and all the furniture was rotting

away. The table yet held together, though spotted all over with white mould; the chair had fallen to pieces, and were lying in the water. The paper was hanging in black rags from the walls, and the presses looked ready to fall on the head of anyone who should venture to approach them.

I looked round, amazed, upon this scene of desolation. Strange! Dilapidated and disfigured as the place was, it yet bore a weird and unaccountable resemblance to my own cabin on board the *Mary-Jane*. My wardrobe stood in that corner of the cabin, just as this did. My berth occupied the recess beside the stove, just as this did. My table stood in the same spot, under the window, just as this did. I could not comprehend it!

I turned to the table and tried the drawers, but the locks were rusty, and the wood had swollen with the damp, and it was only with the utmost difficulty that I broke away the surrounding woodwork, and wrenched them

out. They were filled with mildewed parchments, bundles of letters, pens, account-books, and such other trifles. In one corner lay a mouldy looking-glass in a sliding cover. I recognised the little thing at once—recognized it undeniably, positively. It had been given to me by my mother when I was a boy, and I had never parted with it. I snatched it up with a hand that trembled as if I had the ague. I caught sight of my own face reflected upon its scarred surface.

To my terror, I saw that my beard and hair were no longer chestnut brown, but almost white.

The glass fell from my grasp, and was shattered to fragments upon the wet floor. Merciful Heaven! what spell was upon me? What had happened to me? What strange calamity had befallen my ship? Where were my crew? Grey—grey and old in one short day and night? My ship a ruin, my youth a dream, myself the sport of some

mysterious destiny, the like of which n had ever known before!

I gathered the papers together fro table drawers, and staggered up on decl them like a drunken man. There I sat stupefied, not knowing what to think A frightful gulf seemed to lie between n the past. Yesterday I was young—yes I left my ship, with hope in my hear brown locks upon my head; to-day, I middle-aged man—to-day, I find my sh ting on a desolate beach, the hair white my brow, and the future all a blank! chanically I untied one of the packets ters. The outer ones were so discoloure no writing remained visible upon them. were mere folds of damp brown tinde fell to shreds as I unfolded them. Onl which lay protected in the middle packet, were yet legible. I opened One was from my mother, the other Bessie Robinson. I remembered so wel

I read them last. It was the evening before that misty night when I met the *Adventure* with her cargo of gold and jewels. Fatal night! Accursed ship! Accursed, and thrice accursed wealth, that had tempted me from my duty, and dragged me to destruction!

I read the letters through—at least, all that was legible of them—and my tears fell fast the while. When I had read them a second time, I fell upon my knees and prayed to God to deliver me. After this, I felt somewhat calmer, and having laid the papers carefully aside, began to think what I should do to escape from my captivity.

My first thought was of my crew. The men would seem to have abandoned the *Mary-Jane*. Everything on board, so far as I could perceive, though rotting away, was untouched. There were no signs of plunder; neither had they taken the ship's last boat, in any attempt to put to sea on their own account. I looked down into the hold, and saw

the great packing-cases lying half under water, apparently undisturbed since the hour when I left the vessel. Surely, then, the men must have landed and gone up the island. In that case, where were they? How long had they been gone? What time had gone by since we parted? Was it possible that they could be all lost—or dead? Was I absolutely and utterly alone in this unknown island: and was it my fate to live and die here, like a dog? Alas! alas! of what use were diamonds and gold to me, if this were the price at which I was to purchase them?

With these bitter reflections pressing on my mind, I roused myself by a great effort, and resolved that my first step should be to institute a thorough search for my men along the coast. In order to do this, it was necessary that I should find myself some place of temporary habitation, either in the wreck or on the shore, to which I could retire at night. Also that I should lay up a store of provisions

for my daily use. I likewise determined to set up some kind of signals, here and there, along the cliffs, to guide the men to me, if they were yet wandering about the island. My bundle of jewels, too, needed to be placed in a secure spot, lest any strange ship should find its way into the bay, and other treasure-seekers lay hands upon it. I looked round about me at the rotting timbers and the leaky cabin, and shuddered at the notion of passing a night on board the *Mary-Jane*. The ship looked as if it must be phantom-haunted. It was, at all events, too remarkable an object to be a secure storehouse for my treasures, in case of the arrival of strangers. It was the first place they would ransack. Altogether, I felt it would be safer and pleasanter to stow myself and my jewels in some cavern along the cliffs. I had seen plenty on my way, and I determined to set off at once in search of what I wanted. So I went down again into the cabin to look for

some weapon to carry with me, and having found a rusty marling-spike and cutlass still hanging where I had left them behind the door, thrust them into my belt, slung my bundle over my shoulder, let myself down over the ship's side, and started for a walk under the cliffs. I had not gone far before I found just the spot I wanted. It was a deep cavern, about three feet above the level of the beach, the mouth of which was almost hidden by an angle of rock, and was quite invisible from some little distance. The inside of the cave was smooth, and carpeted with soft white sand. The walls were dry, and tapestried here and there with velvety lichens. In short, it was precisely such a retreat as best accorded with my present purposes. I took possession of it at once, by stowing away my bundle of jewels on a sort of natural shelf at the remotest end of the cave. I then traced a great cross in the sand before the entrance, that I might find my lodging again without

difficulty, and went out to seek something in the shape of food and firewood.

The first easy path up the face of the cliffs brought me to the outskirts of the palm forests. I climbed the nearest tree, and flung down about twenty nuts. They were by no means such fine nuts as those farther in amid the woods; but I had taken a kind of superstitious horror of the interior of the island, and had no mind now to venture one step farther than was necessary. I then carried my nuts to the edge of the cliff, and rolled them over. By these means, I saved myself the labour of carrying them down, and had only to pick them up from the beach, and store them in the cave, close under the shelf where I had hidden my jewels. By this time, in spite of my trouble, I was very hungry; but the sun was bending westward, and I was anxious to make another excursion to the ship before nightfall; so I promised myself that I would dine and sup together by-and-by,

and so proceeded once more in the direction of the *Mary-Jane*.

What I wanted now was, if it were possible to find them, a couple of blankets, a hatchet to break up my cocoa-nuts, a bottle of some kind of spirits, and a piece of tarpaulin to hang at night before the entrance to my cavern. I hauled myself up again by the cable-chain, and went down into the cabin. I found my bed a mere shelf-ful of rotten rags. If I hoped to find blankets anywhere it must be among the ship's stores, in some place more protected from the damp. I forced open the locker in which I used to keep spirits. Here I was fortunate enough to discover two unopened cases of fine French brandy, apparently quite unspoiled. These I at once carried upon deck, and then let myself down into the hold. There I found several pieces of tolerably sound tarpaulin, and some packing-cases on the top, which seemed comparatively dry. One of these, which I

knew, by the marks yet visible on the cover, ought to contain many valuable necessaries, I prized open with my marline-spike, and found filled with blankets, rugs, and other woollen goods. They were damp, and spotted with mildew, but not rotten. I made two great bundles of the best that I could find, and laid them beside the spirit-cases, on the deck. Searching still farther, I came upon a box of carpenter's tools, an old horn-lantern with about an inch of candle left in it, a small chopper, and a bag of rusty nails. There were plenty of barrels of ship's biscuits, pork, gunpowder, and flour in sight; but as they were all more or less immersed in water, I knew it would be mere waste of time to inspect their contents. Besides, the sun was now declining fast, and I was anxious to carry all that I could to my cavern before the sudden tropical night should come.

I then made three loads of my blankets, tarpaulins, spirit-cases, tools, and so forth;

lowered them over the ship's side one by one; and in three journeys conveyed them all to my cave before sunset. I had, even then, time to transport thither some large pieces of timber, the fragments probably of former wrecks, which were lying strewn about the beach. With these I made a good fire, which lighted up the inside of my dwelling, and enabled me to make myself quite comfortable for the night. To spread a warm bed of rugs and blankets, to nail up a large tarpaulin before my door, and to make an excellent supper of cocoa-nuts, cocoa-milk, and a little brandy, were the occupations of my evening. As my fire began to burn low, I wrapped myself in my blankets, murmured a short prayer for safety and forgiveness, and fell sound asleep.

I woke next morning with the sunrise, and started directly after breakfast upon my first expedition in search of the crew of the *Mary-Jane*. All that day I travelled along the margin of the bay in a north-west and west-

erly direction, stopping every now and then to pile up a little cairn of loose stones that might serve as a signal. I returned to my cavern at dusk, having seen no sign of human footsteps or human habitation in any direction, and having walked, first and last, a good twenty miles at the least. This time I brought home some more firewood, and about half a bushel of mussels, which I had found clustered on the low rocks by the sea. I ate the mussels uncooked for my supper, and, having a famous appetite, thought them the most delicious dish I had ever tasted.

The next day, and the next again, and for many days after that, I persevered in my search, trying first north, and then east and south, and finding no trace of my crew. Wherever I went, I raised cairns along the beach and on the edges of the cliffs; and once or twice even laboured to carry up a piece of broken mast and a scrap of ragged canvas to some little headland, and so raised a kind of

humble flagstaff where I thought it migh be seen conspicuously from either sea o shore. I often stopped in these voluntar tasks, to sit down and shed a torrent o bitter tears. At night I amused my self by shaping my cocoa shells int drinking-cups and basins, and fitting u my cave with shelves and other little con veniencies. I contrived, too, to vary my die with cockles, mussels, and occasionally young turtle, when I was so fortunate as t find one on the beach. These I ate some times boiled and sometimes roasted; and as grew very weary of so much cocoa-milk, brought a leathern bucket from the wreck and used to fetch myself fresh water from spring about half a mile from home. I like wise searched out a kettle, a couple of hatchets a pea-jacket but little the worse for damp, tw or three pair of shoes, a chest containin some uninjured stores of sugar and spices some more cases of wine and spirits, an

various other articles, all of which contributed essentially to my comfort. I also found one or two Bibles; but these were so much spoiled that no more than twenty or thirty leaves were legible in each. As these were not, however, the same in each book, I found I had between seventy and eighty readable leaves—in all, about one hundred and fifty-five pages printed in double columns; the perusal and possession of which proved a great blessing to me in my lonely situation, and gave me strength, many and many a time, to bear my trial with fortitude, when I should otherwise have sunk into utter despair.

Thus a long time passed. I took no regular account of the weeks; but perhaps as many as fourteen or fifteen may have gone by in this manner. I devoted at first every day, then about four days, and at last not more than one or two days in each week, to the prosecution of my apparently hopeless search.

At last I found that I had explored all the part of the island which lay immediately round about my cavern for a distance of at least twelve miles in all directions. I could now do no more, unless I shifted the centre of my observations, or undertook a regular tour of the coast. After some deliberation I decided upon the latter course, and, having furnished myself with a flask of brandy, a blanket tightly strapped up like a soldier's knapsack, a hatchet, cutlass, compass, telescope, tinder-box, and staff, started one morning upon my journey.

It was now, as nearly as I could judge, about the first week in April, and the weather was enchantingly beautiful. My route, for the first day, lay along the same path that I had already trodden once or twice, up the north side of the great bay. When I wanted food, I gathered some cocoa-nuts from the adjacent woods, and at night I slept in a cavern very much like the one which I now

called my "home." The next day I pursued the same direction, and provided myself with food and shelter after the same fashion. On the third day, I came to a point where the cliffs receded from the seaboard, and a broad tract of grassland came down almost to the verge of the beach. I was now obliged to have recourse to shell-fish and such berries as I could find, for my daily food. This made me somewhat anxious for the future; for I foresaw that, if the palm forests were to fail me for many days together, I should be obliged to give up my design, and return home with my doubts yet unresolved. However, I made up my mind to persevere as long as possible; and, having walked till nearly nightfall, supped on such fare as I could pick up from the beach and the bushes, and slept in the open air, with only the deep grass for my couch and the stars for my canopy.

On the fourth day I pursued the same course, with the savannah still bordering the

shore, and on the fifth had the satisfaction of finding the palms, and some other trees, again fringing the beach; sometimes in clumps or plantations; sometimes scattered here and there on rising knolls, like the trees in a well-arranged English park. Among these, to my great joy and refreshment, I found several fine bread-trees and some wild sugar-canes; and, towards afternoon, came upon a delicious spring of fresh water, which bubbled up from the midst of a natural reservoir, and flowed away among the deep grasses in a little channel almost hidden by flowers and wild plants. In this charming spot I determined to stay for the remainder of the day; for I was weary, and in need of repose. So I lay down beside the spring; feasted on bread fruit and sugar-cane juice; bathed my face and hands in the cool spring; and enjoyed some hours of delicious rest. At nightfall I crept into a little nook amid a clump of spreading trees, and slept profoundly.

The next morning I awoke, as usual, with the sunrise. I had been thinking the evening before that this would be the pleasantest spot in which to pitch my tent for the summer, should nothing more hopeful turn up; and I now resolved, before resuming my journey, to reconnoitre the little oasis, and fix upon some site where I might command a good view of the sea, and yet enjoy the benefits of the trees and the grass. A green hill, surmounted by a crown of palms and other trees, and lying about half a mile from the water-line, looked as if it might exactly present the advantages I sought. I went up to it, in the clear, cool air of the early morning, brushing the dew from the grass as I strode along, and feeling quite reinvigorated by my night's rest. As I mounted the little hill, a new prospect began opening before me, and I saw, what I had not suspected while on the level below, that the savannah was surrounded on three sides by the sea, and that by crossing it in a direct

line I should save some miles of coastii little reflection led me, consequently, conclusion that I had now reached th northerly part of the island, according chart, and that from the summit of the should probably come in sight of the island.

Absorbed in these thoughts, I reach top almost before I was aware of it, a proceeding to make my way through tl in search of the view on the other side something close by, reared against the of three palms which grew near t in a little angle, attracted my attenti advanced—hesitated—rushed forward eyes had not deceived me—it was a hu

At first, I was so agitated that I lean against a tree for support. When somewhat recovered my composure, an to examine the outside of the hut with tion, I saw that it was utterly dilap and bore every mark of having been d

for a long time. The sides were made of wattled twigs and clay, and the roof, which had partly fallen in, of canes, palm-leaves, and interwoven branches. On the turf outside were the remains of a blackened circle, as if large fires had been kindled there; and in the midst of the circle lay some smooth stones, which might have once served the purposes of an oven. Close by, at the foot of a large bread-tree, about half-way between the hut and the spot where I was standing, rose two grassy mounds of about six feet each in length and two feet in width—just such mounds as may be seen in the corner appropriated to the poor in any English country churchyard. At the sight of these graves—for graves I felt they were—my heart sank within me. I went up to the low arch which served as an entrance to the hut. It was partially closed from the inside by a couple of rotten planks. I removed the planks with a trembling hand, and looked within. All was dark and damp,

save where a portion of the roof had fallen in, and hidden the ground beneath. Feverishly, desperately, I began to tear away the wattled walls. I felt that I must penetrate the secret of the place. I knew, as surely as if the hand of God himself had written it on the earth and sky, that my poor sailors had here found their last resting-places.

Oh, heavens! how shall I describe the scene that met my eyes when I had torn the frail fence from its foundations, and lifted away the roof, that had fallen as if on purpose to hide that melancholy scene from the very stars and sun! A bed of dead leaves and mosses —a human skeleton yet clothed in a few blackened rags—three rusty muskets—a few tin cups, and knives, and such poor necessaries, all thickly coated with red dust—some cocoa shells—a couple of hatchets—a bottle corked and tied over at the mouth, as sailors prepare records for committal to the sea—these were the relics that I found, and the sight of

them smote me with a terrible, unutterable conviction of misfortune.

I seized the bottle, staggered away to a distance of some yards from the fatal spot, broke it against the bark of the nearest tree, and found, as I had expected, a written paper inside. For some minutes I had not courage to read it. When, at last, my eyes were less dim, and my hand steadier, I deciphered the following words:—

"August 30th 1761.

"I, Aaron Taylor, mate of the schooner *Mary-Jane*, write these words:—Our captain, William Barlow, left the vessel in the small boat, accompanied by Joshua Dunn, seaman, two hours after daybreak on the 24th of December last, A.D. 1760. The weather was foggy, and the ship lay to within hearing of breakers. The captain left me in charge of the vessel, with directions to anchor in the bay off which we then lay, and left orders that

we were to send an exploring party ashore in case he did not return by the evening of the fourth day. In the course of the 25th (Christmas Day), the fog cleared off, and we found ourselves lying just off the curve of the bay, as our captain had stated. We then anchored according to instructions. The four days went by, and neither the captain nor Joshua Dunn returned. Neither did we see any signs of the boat along that part of the shore against which we lay at anchor. The two seamen who yet remained on board were then despatched by me in the long-boat, to search along the east coast of the island; but they returned at the end of three days without having seen any traces of the captain, the sailor, or the small boat. One of these men, named James Grey, and myself, started again at the end of a few more days of waiting. I left John Cartwright in charge of the vessel, with orders to keep a strict look-out along shore for the captain or Dunn. We landed,

hauled our boat up high and dry, and made for the interior of the country, which consisted apparently of nothing but dense forest, in which we wandered for five days without success. Returning in a south-east direction from the northward part of the forest-land, James Grey fell ill with fever, and was unable to get back so far as the boat. I left him on a high spot of ground sheltered by trees, made him a bed of leaves and moss, and went back to the ship for help. When I reached the *Mary-Jane*, I found John Cartwright also sick with fever, though less ill than Grey. He was able to help in bringing along blankets and other necessaries, and he and I built up this hut together, and laid our dying messmate in it. On the second day from this, Cartwright, who had over-exerted himself while he was already ailing of the same disease, became so much worse that he, too, was unable to get back to the ship, or to do anything but lie down in the hut beside Grey.

I did all I could for them, and tried to do my duty by the ship as well as by the men. I went down to the shore every evening to look after the schooner, and went on board every morning; and I nursed the poor fellows as well as I could, by keeping up fires just outside the hut, and supplying them with warm food, warm drinks, and well aired blankets. It was not for me to save them, however. They both died before a fortnight was gone by—James Grey first, and Cartwright a few hours after. I buried them both close against the hut, and returned to the ship, not knowing what better to do, but having very little hope left of ever seeing Captain Barlow or Joshua Dunn in this world again. I was now quite alone, and, as I believed, the last survivor of all the crew. I felt it my duty to remain by the ship, and at anchor in the same spot, till every chance of the captain's return should have gone by. I made up my mind, in short, to stay till the 25th of March, namely, three

months from the time when Captain Barlow left the vessel; and then to navigate her into the nearest port. Long before that, however, I began to feel myself ailing. I doctored myself from the captain's medicine-chest; but the drugs only seemed to make me worse instead of better. I was not taken, however, exactly as Grey and Cartwright were. They fell ill and broke down suddenly—I ailed, and lingered, got better and worse, and dragged on a weary, sickly life from week to week, and from month to month, till not only the three months had gone, but three more to the back of them; and yet I had no strength or power to stir from the spot. I was so weak that I could not have weighed anchor to save my life; and so thin that I could count every bone under my skin. At length, on the night of the 18th of June, there came a tremendous hurricane, which tore the schooner from her moorings, and drove her upon the shore, high and dry—about a hundred yards

above the usual high-water mark. I thought she would have been dashed to pieces, and was almost glad to think I should now be rid of my miserable life, and die in the sea at last. But it was God's will that I should not end so. The ship was stranded, and I with her. I now saw my fate before me. I was doomed, anyhow, to live or die on the island. If I recovered, I could never get the *Mary-Jane* to sea again, but must spend all my years alone on the cursed island. This was my bitterest grief. I think it has broken my heart. Since I have been cast ashore, I have grown more and more sickly, and now that I feel I have not many more days to live, I write this narrative of all that has happened since Captain Barlow left the ship, in the hope that it may some day fall into the hands of some Christian seaman who will communicate its contents to my mother and sisters at Bristol. I have been living up at the hut of late, since the heat set in; and have written this in sight of my mess-

mates' graves. When I have sealed it in a bottle, I shall try to carry it down to the shore, and either leave it on board the *Mary-Jane*, or trust it to the waves. I should like my mother to have my gold watch, and I give my dog Peter, whom I left at home, to my cousin Ellen. If any kind Christian finds this paper, I pray him to bury my bones. God forgive me all my sins. Amen.

"AARON TAYLOR.

"August 30th, 1761."

I will not try to describe what I felt on reading this simple and straightforward narrative; or with what bitter remorse and helpless wonder I looked back upon the evil my obstinacy had wrought. But for me, and my insatiate thirst for wealth, these men would now have been living and happy. I felt as if I had been their murderer, and raved and wept miserably as I dug a third trench, and laid in it the remains of my brave and honest mate.

Besides all this, there was a heavy mystery hanging upon me, which I tried to fathom, and could not comprehend. Taylor's narrative was dated just eight months after I left the ship, and to me it seemed that scarcely three had gone by. Nor was that all. His body had had time to decay to a mere skeleton—the ship had had time to become a mere wreck—my own head had had time to grow grey! What had happened to me? I asked myself that weary question again, and again, and again, till my head and my heart ached, and I could only kneel down and pray to God that my wits were not taken from me.

I found the watch with difficulty, and, taking it and the paper with me, went back, sadly and wearily, to my cavern by the sea. I had now no hope or object left but to escape from the island if I could, and this thought haunted me all the way home, and possessed me day and night. For more than a week I deliberated as to what means were best for

my purpose, and hesitated whether to build me a raft of the ship's timbers, or try to fit the long-boat for sea. I decided at last upon the latter. I spent many weeks in piecing, calking and trimming her to the best of my ability, and thought myself quite a skilful ship's carpenter when I had fitted her with a mast, and a sail, and a new rudder, and got her ready for the voyage. This done, I hauled her down, with infinite labour and difficulty, as far as the tide mark on the beach, ballasted her with provisions and fresh water, shoved her off at high tide, and put to sea. So eager was I to escape, that I had all but forgotten my bundle of jewels, and had to run for them at the last moment, at the risk of seeing my boat floated off before I could get back. As to venturing once again to the city of treasures, it had never crossed my mind for an instant since the morning when I came down through the palm-forests and found the *Mary-Jane* a ruin on the beach.

Nothing would now have induced me to return there. I believed the place to be accursed, and could not think of it without a shudder. As for the captain of the *Adventure*, I believed him to be the Evil One in person, and his store of gold an infernal bait to lure men to destruction! I believed it then, and I believe it now, solemnly.

The rest of my story may be told very briefly. After running before the wind for eleven days and nights, in a north-easterly direction, I was picked up by a Plymouth merchantman, about forty-five miles west of Marignana. The captain and crew treated me with kindness, but evidently looked upon me as a harmless madman. No one believed my story. When I described the islands, they laughed; when I opened my store of jewels, they shook their heads, and gravely assured me that they were only lumps of spar and sandstone; when I described the condition of my ship, and related the misfor-

tunes of my crew, they told me the schooner *Mary-Jane* had been lost at sea twenty years ago, with every hand on board. Unfortunately, I found that I had left my mate's narrative behind me in the cavern, or perhaps my story would have found more credit. When I swore that to me it seemed less than six months since I had put off in the small boat with Joshua Dunn, and was capsized among the breakers, they brought the ship's log to prove that instead of its being the 25th of December A.D. 1760, when I came back to the beach, and saw the *Mary-Jane* lying high and dry between the rocks, it must have been nearer the 25th of December, 1780, the twentieth Christmas, namely, of the glorious and happy reign of our most gracious sovereign, King George the Third.

Was this true? I know not. Everyone says so; but I cannot bring myself to believe that twenty years could have passed over my head like one long summer day. Yet the

world is strangely changed, and I with it, and the mystery is still unexplained as ever to my bewildered brain.

I went back to England with the merchantman, and to my native place among the Mendip Hills. My mother had been dead twelve years. Bessie Robinson was married, and the mother of four children. My youngest brother was gone to America; and my old friends had all forgotten me. I came among them like a ghost, and for a long time they could hardly believe that I was indeed the same William Barlow who had sailed away in the *Mary-Jane*, young and full of hope twenty years before.

Since my return home, I have tried to sell my jewels again and again; but in vain. No merchant will buy them. I have sent charts of the Treasure Isles over and over again to the Board of Admiralty, but receive no replies to my letters. My dream of wealth has faded year by year, with my strength and

my hopes. I am poor, and I am declining into old age. Everyone is kind to me, but their kindness is mixed with pity; and I feel strange and bewildered at times, not knowing what to think of the past, and seeing nothing to live for in the future. Kind people who read this true statement, pray for me.

(Signed) WILLIAM BARLOW,

Discoverer of the Treasure Isles, and formerly Captain of the Schooner *Mary-Jane*.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

LONDON: PRINTED BY MACDONALD AND TUGWELL, BLENHEIM HOUSE.